THE END OF JINGLE BILL by THOMSON BURTIS

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OCT.

Adventure

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by SAM C. DUNHAM

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M. V. HEBERDEN
PAUL ANNIXTER
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AND MANY OTHERS

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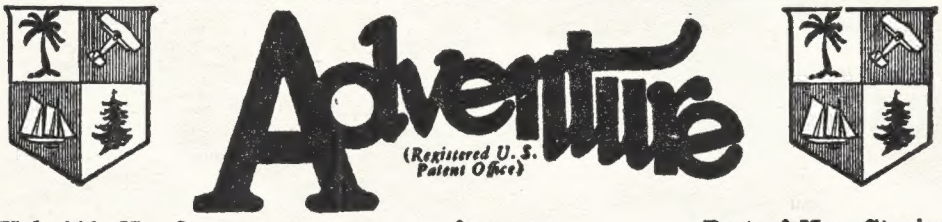

Vol. 111, No. 6 for Best of New Stories
October, 1944

NOVELETTES

The End of Jingle Bill.....THOMSON BURTIS 10
Tampico was a madhouse, wells were blowing in for fifty thousand barrels a day, the Huasteca outfit were holding their fenced-in acreage for $300,000,000—they got it later—and you might say the goose hung high when Hunk Gardiner, Monte Mathews and I landed in Farazan to drill our second million out of the field. It would have been easy pickings, too, if "Jingle Bill" Smith hadn't ridden all the way from Africa to chisel in on our game.

Last Betrayal.....M. V. HEBERDEN 98
"In spite of being Irish, your family—and you—have always served the British Crown," Colonel Smithshand, the Intelligence chief began. Then Brandon cut in—"In other words you've got a dirty job that needs doing in Eire. Tell me what it is and I'll tell you if I'll do it." The mission must have appealed for the first thing Brandon knew he'd been smuggled across the border and was up to his ears in trouble.

SHORT STORIES

Battle Condition.....RAY MILLHOLLAND 46
When a man is really scared his legs turn to rubber and his feet swivel around and point backwards. Then somebody jams a corncob down his throat that he can't swallow or cough up. A big black thing with yellow eyes and teeth as long as a bayonet starts chasing him. That's fear. Of course Private Magurth wouldn't know anything about that. What happened to him must have been something else again.

Eyes in the Corner.....PAUL ANNIXTER 54
Blount learned something in the moment he spent looking that she-cobra in the eye. Now he can almost believe those tales the Burmese natives tell about how the snakes can discriminate between friendly and enemy humans. And he's glad the one that made her home in his water jar got away.

Thundering Juggernaut.....JOHN SCOTT DOUGLAS 60
The Cape Deliverance buoy was adrift and that meant eleven tons of concentrated danger were threshing about in those icy Alaskan waters to menace wartime shipping lanes. But the buoy wasn't half as lethal as the whistler that broke loose from its shackles on the *Birch's* own deck when the lighthouse tender was out searching for the stray. Now there were two steel mavericks to lasso with hawsers—one afloat and one aboard—and God help the salt water cowboy who didn't cast a perfect loop!

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BE OUT ON OCTOBER 11TH ◆ ◆ ◆

King's Pirate..... WILL F. JENKINS 120

O'Hara's half-witted nurse prophesied that he'd hang at a yardarm and afterwards live as the happiest of men. He'd fulfilled the first half of the prediction all right. Now all he had to do was marry Dorothy Boyd before Lord Protector Cromwell's Commissioners for the West Indies could swing him aloft again.

The Tired Old Bag of Buka.....STUART D. LUDLUM 126

The South Pacific was no place for Betsy in the first place and anyhow none of her crew had wings, except Margo of course. But the old bag had plenty of toilet tissue aboard so off we went. And that, apparently, was all we needed to *not* get any Presidential Citation or even rate being mentioned in an official communique.

THE SERIAL

Captains Don't Cry (3rd of 5 parts)..... EDMUND GILLIGAN 74

The *Golden Hind* had readied her trawl-tubs—conch horns, gobsticks and gaffs were stowed—and now the call of "Dory away!" echoed through the fog. For the first half of the gallant schooner's struggle to keep her head above water had been fought and lost when the *Western Star's* precious keel vanished in the roaring storm. Now the second phase was to begin—the fight for fish—to win which meant the *Hind's* last chance for salvation.

THE FACT STORY

Riley Grannan's Last Adventure.....SAM C. DUNHAM 68

That memorable oration of the Old West which, down through the years since we first printed it in these pages back in January 1912, has become the most famous feature ever to appear in *Adventure.*

DEPARTMENTS

The Camp-Fire.....Where readers, writers and adventurers meet 6

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Ask Adventure Experts.....The men who furnish it 136

Lost Trails..... Where old paths cross 144

The Trail Ahead.....News of next month's issue 119

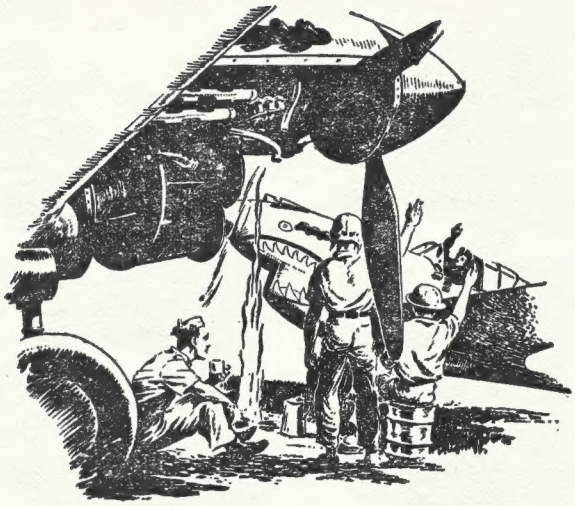
Cover painted for Adventure by Rafael DeSoto

Kenneth S. White, Editor

IF YOUR COPY OF THIS MAGAZINE IS LATE—

We regret that, due to the difficulties of wartime transportation, your *Adventure* may sometimes be a little late in reaching you. If this should happen, your patience will be appreciated. Please do not write complaining of the delay. It occurs after the magazine leaves our offices and is caused by conditions beyond our control.

—The Publishers.



THE CAMP-FIRE

Where Readers, Writers and Adventurers Meet

ONLY one recruit to the ranks of our Writers' Brigade this month. Stuart D. Ludlum, Lieut., USNR, who gives us "The Tired Old Bag of Buka," sends greetings to the *Camp-Fire* from Miami, Florida, where he is currently stationed, and introduces himself thuswise—

> During my last year at Yale (1931) the Navy argued me out of Army flight training and into Navy . . . until the last minute. Then they changed the height requirement for a few months, and I was half an inch too short. (Of course, my height is fine now that I am an old man by flight standards.) So I went to Mexico and coached the University of Mexico football team for one season. I was going to travel around the world on my earnings, but they never materialized, and I returned to New York for a year of newspaper writing (Long Island *Daily Press*) before busting into advertising.
>
> Copywriting led to radio writing and production, a two-child family and Bronxville commuter trains. Then came the war . . . and a request from the Navy to join up to do radio programs on Naval Aviation. As soon as I was sworn in, I was put to movie-making. I wrote, directed and assisted in the shooting of two technicolor shorts Warners released. No radio, of course. When three other Navy movie short shorts I was working on were cancelled, I came to Florida, where I am serving as Assistant to the Superintendent of Aviation Training at the Naval Air Station, Miami. Here's where the Navy's torpedo plane and dive-bomber pilots get the last word before going out to combat. Collaborating with combat-experienced instructors, I have written a book on the old Yorktown aircraft carrier which will present the early Pacific air war up through the Battle of Midway with specific detail not found in other works, thoroughness and accuracy ignored by journalists, and with the same enthusiasm with which "Mike and I" went to war with Betsy. The only catch is . . . Navy Public Relations still won't O.K. it. I'm still waiting to do that radio program the gold braid talked about two years ago.
>
> Incidentally, I once was a member of a group of six aviation enthusiasts who owned a blimp and had the only commercial blimp company in the country other than Goodyear. It is a long and crazy story that starts in the hangar at Lakehurst, New Jersey, and ends in front of a blimp hangar that is now used as a storage warehouse right here on NAS, Miami. I'll tell you about it someday.

JOHN SCOTT DOUGLAS adds the following interesting notations to "Thundering Juggernaut," his story of the Lighthouse Service on page 60. He says—

> The work deck of a lighthouse tender differs in many respects from the well deck of a merchantman. The hatches are very nearly flush with the deck, to allow buoys to be handled freely and whaleboats to be repaired on deck after smashing against unfriendly rocks. A number of deck ringbolts are secured to the work deck of a lighthouse tender. The chain connecting buoy and its sinker (anchor) is laid out in parallel rows before a buoy is set, every

(Continued on page 8)

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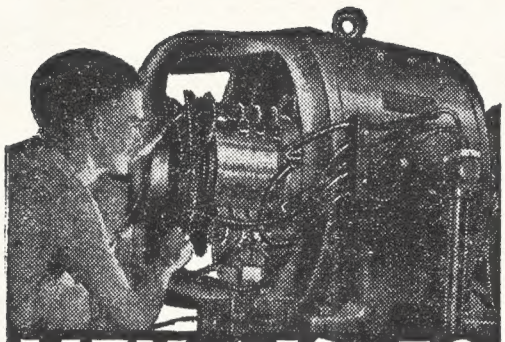

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(Continued from page 6)

few rows of chain shackled to a ring-bolt, so too much of the chain won't get into motion at one time and flip the buoy around at the wrong time.

That nearly happened when we were doing a job for the Navy in the Aleutians and using three-inch chain; the chain ripped through six or seven sets of rope shackles, only the final shackles proving sound enough to save our rail and some of the deck plates and God knows what else. The mates looked like anemic ghosts when they came down to mess after this experience.

It seems strange that some way cannot be found to prevent buoys from breaking loose during storms, but for story purposes this lapse in human ingenuity is most fortunate. Big whistlers have broken their steel shackles on both the lighthouse tenders *Cedar* and *Hemlock* when crossing the Gulf of Alaska, and also in other seas. No Frankenstein creation of fiction could be more terrifying than a rolling buoy which must be stalked and recaptured, often in darkness, almost invariably in heavy seas which make adequate control of a ship almost impossible.

Lighthouse-tender men must have alert minds and electric reflexes to survive, but danger is such a constant shipmate that they laugh off the narrow escapes as an inevitable commonplace of their work. It was impossible to live for three months with the men of the *Cedar*, watching them cheerfully facing danger in their everyday work, without regarding them with the deepest respect.

WE KNEW there was a lot of historical fact mixed in along with the fiction in "The End of Jingle Bill" by Thomson Burtis. We asked the author to do a little sorting out of the two elements for us and here's how he replied—

In the yarn I have tried to condense and dramatize the events of several years in the Tampico oilfields, with particular attention to (1) the revolutionary activities which went on, and (2) the career of the fabulous Monte Michaels. The fact that I have intertwined the two is not so far from the truth, either.

The climax of years of more or less abortive revolutionary movements which drove foreign oilmen nuts was the revolutionists sweeping through a portion of the fields and destroying wells and oil with considerable abandon. In 1924 I was shown vast stretches of terrain which was still black with the rain of oil which had fallen on it from wells which the revolutionists had simply opened and let go wild until they went dry. Sticking out of the ground in these territories were the sad little stumps of pipe which had once been big produc-

(Continued on page 139)

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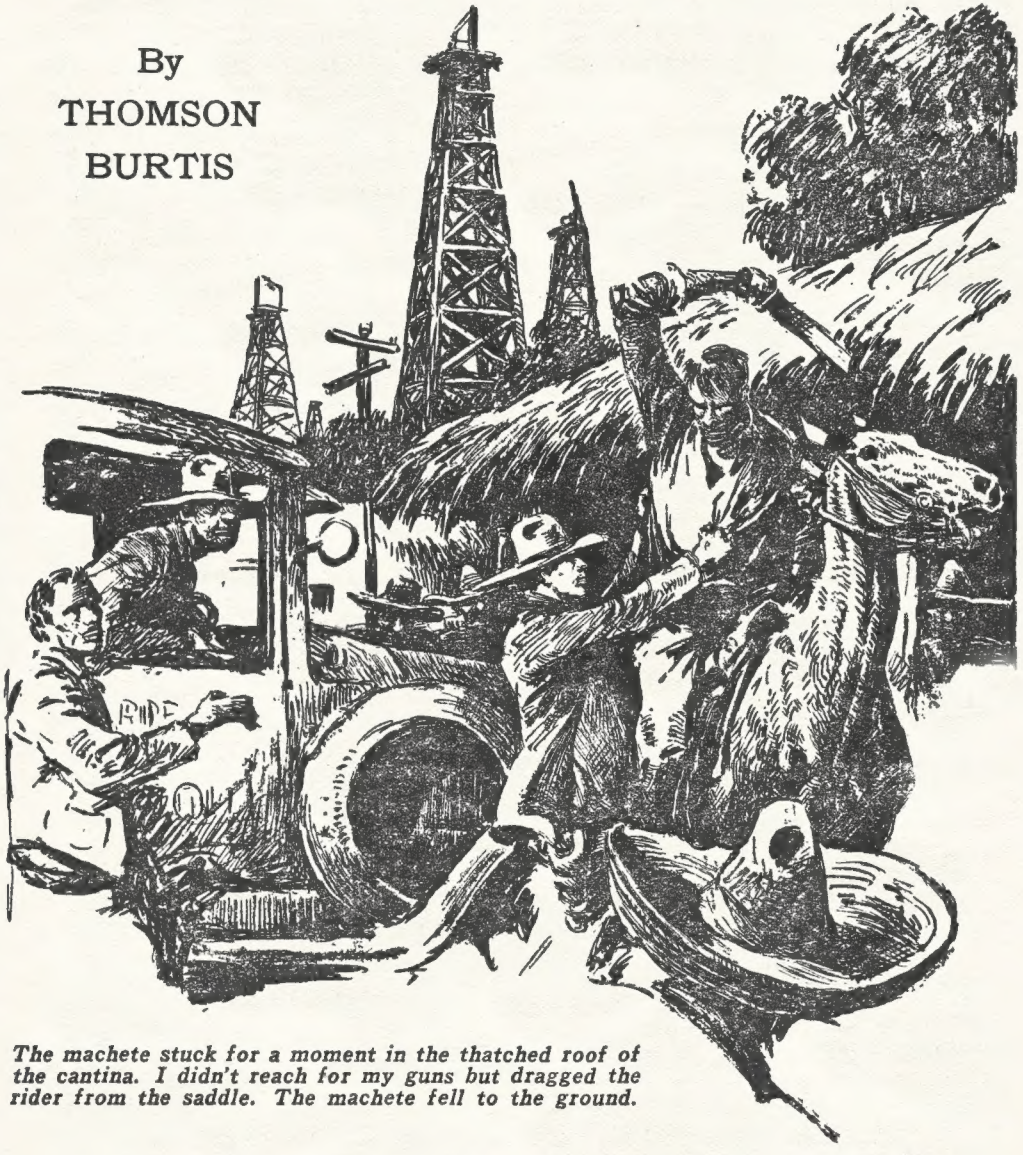
The End of Jingle

By THOMSON BURTIS



The machete stuck for a moment in the thatched roof of the cantina. I didn't reach for my guns but dragged the rider from the saddle. The machete fell to the ground.

ALONG with several hundred million other people with access to radios, I spent the last few days and nights of August, 1939, listening to bulletins on the approach of war. And all those hours I kept wondering.

I figured there wasn't one human being out of a hundred—including most of the rulers of the earth—who wouldn't do anything within reason to escape war, and maybe a billion people all told who dreaded it with a terror that passes understanding. And yet we all sat and listened and felt ourselves sliding helplessly into it, as though we were in a tank rolling down hill with no steering apparatus or way to brake it. Which is what the human race may find itself doing if unique minds don't quit inventing things that ordinary people can't handle.

And the longer I listened, the more it re-

Bill

ILLUSTRATED BY NICK EGGENHOFER

minded me of a sizable little war fought at the height of the Tampico oil boom in Mexico, not too many years ago. The struggle was between most of the big oil companies of the world—including my own, which was a little one at that time—on the one side; and just Jingle Bill Smith—as fabulous a character as ever stepped out of the monte to make himself immortal in the oil business—on the other.

It was fought by considerable bodies of men on land, in the air, and on a couple of rivers. We all watched ourselves drifting deeper into it, and no one could seem to stop it. From its war of nerves to the international cast that played it, our fracas was a microscopic edition of what the world is going through now.

Tampico was a madhouse, wells were blowing in for fifty thousand barrels a day, the Huasteca outfit were holding their fenced-in acreage for three hundred million dollars—they got it later from Standard—and you might say the goose hung high.

Some human varieties of that admirable bird—of which, when the wind is in the east, I happen to be one—were hanged even higher, and more permanently.

Personally I was just a nervously flapping tail to Border Petroleum's kite, but I saw enough action to give me a bellyful of war, theoretically. Actually, I enjoy a fight as much as the next man. More, some people think.

It did something to or for everybody and everything connected with it, and affected international relations, the oil business all over the world, and particularly the comfort station situation in Farazan, Mexico, and this was the way of it . . .

I WAS sitting around the cookhouse of the little temporary camp we'd set up sixty miles or so south of Tampico, on land we hoped to lease, when the phone rang and Hunk Gardiner's bass voice boomed over it.

"We came, we saw, we conquered Mexico City!" he roared. "Got the concession, and we're on our way! Get in that toolpusher and meet us at Don Alvarado's hacienda as quick as you can make it!"

"How quick can *you* make it?" I asked.

"Hell, I'm there. Monte'll soon be here, and Don Alvarado will be back at four."

Which was exactly like Hunk Gardiner, president of International Oil in the States, and Border Petroleum in Mexico. As I jounced through the thick monte on my way to the hacienda I wondered how he had got to the place so quickly.

He was really Hallowell Adams Gardiner, III, of Boston; Bachelor of Science of Princeton and Bachelor of Laws of Harvard; the greatest all-round athlete ever turned out by either institution. All of which things he acted like not at all. That is, except once in a while.

He'd gone into the Pennsylvania fields with borrowed money and cleaned up. Then he parlayed his stake into a big fortune in Oklahoma in 1907.

During the Sepulveda boom there, Hunk had collided head-on with Monte Mathews, and, to some extent with myself.* Monte was then only a guy with a horse and two guns, both of which he could handle with the delicacy of a master musician and the speed of a striking rattlesnake. He was nicknamed "Monte" because that's what they call the "jungle" in Mexico, and he'd spent some time there. I was a twenty-year-old kid up from the Texas border, anxious to learn the business and with some refined larceny in my heart. I soon learned from Hunk and Monte that the larceny in the oil business was as crude as the stuff we were drilling for.

Well, after fighting each other like the wildcats—figuratively and literally—which they were, Hunk and Monte had got together, and I sort of went along with the deal. The result was that Monte and myself were minor stockholders in International, and between us owned all the stock Hunk didn't in Border Pete.

When the smell of oil came up from Mexico, we'd sailed in. The best we'd been able to do in that hundred-and-twenty-mile field, which was roaring louder every day, was that Hunk had wangled an option on two thousand acres right in the middle of the field. It was owned by Don Alvarado de Rizzaro. But it wasn't worth a nickel until Mexico City O.K.'d the concession, and the highbinding pirates of Standard, Texas, Royal Dutch Shell and others wouldn't have given more than five million dollars and their right eyes to block our play.

But Hunk Gardiner on the rampage was a shining red bull who couldn't be stopped when he had his tail up—not even by Mexico City politics, which were really something in those days. Monte Mathews had had a short but sensational career in Mexico City under Diaz, and so he'd gone along. Between them, they had put it over. Between them they could come close to putting anything over.

I acknowledged these things to Hunk in person when I was admitted into the huge patio of the hacienda, where Hunk and Don Alvarado were drinking brandy with a mousy little Mexican who looked like what he was—a notary public.

"I pulled the cord, stopped the train, and hired a horse and rode here cross-country," Gardiner explained, grinning like the big kid he was. "Monte went on to Verita to send some telegrams, but he'll be here any minute by taxi, truck or horseback. Wanted my whole staff to be in at the signing, Don Alvarado."

"Understandable," smiled the white-haired old Spaniard who owned so much land that it took three days even to see across it. He was a very shrewd hombre, too. "I have a slight disappointment for you gentlemen, which I trust will not prove too serious."

"Yes?" snapped Hunk.

Suddenly he was no longer the roughneck celebrant of excellent luck, but all State Street businessman.

A month in the city had softened him up a little, I could see.

He was a six-foot-two giant with gorilla arms hanging from immense, sloping shoulders. His fists showed the scars of winning the intercollegiate heavyweight championship plus knocking plenty of mutinous oil-town characters around. His face was square in contour and jaw, and close inspection revealed that it had been trodden upon by more than one set of cleated shoes laced to the feet of bigtime football players.

He liked to wear two-hundred-dollar suits

* *"The War of the Wildcats" by Thomson Burtis. January, 1944* Adventure.

in the city, and rags discarded by the nearest scarecrow when out in the field. Now he was in a compromise costume of riding breeches and boots, tweed jacket and open shirt. His fiery red hair looked as it almost always did—as though four canaries had just flown out of it.

His pug nose seemed to lift a little, as though scenting danger, and his slightly battered eyes were a cold blue as he waited for the landowner to continue. Just turn your back to light a cigarette and those bandits in the Tampico field would have fifteen hundred feet of drillstem out of your well and on the way to their own. That is, if they needed it. If they didn't, they'd do it just to keep in practice. The legal and political strategems which weren't used in Mexico don't exist.

Inasmuch as International was land poor, and Border Petroleum flat broke, I listened with some interest. It turned to premature relief when Don Alvarado said, "It is Pedro Sarolla. As I informed you when I signed the option for all my holdings in this section, five hundred acres in the approximate center were deeded by my father to the father of Pedro Sarolla. I assured you that Sarolla, senior, would do anything I said. I spoke to him and he agreed."

"That five hundred acres looks to our geologists like the very core of any pool there may be on your acreage," said Hallowell Adams Gardiner, III, casually.

Don Alvarado inclined his head and went on, "Since I signed the option, three months ago, the elder Sarolla has died. Young Pedro, who has been off adventuring in the world with a man known as "Jungle" Bill—or sometimes "Jingle" Bill—has returned, older and not well. He has talent as an artist, and is temperamental and very nationalistic. My men bring me rumors from Huabrache—the name of the little settlement around Sarolla's mill—that Pedro is not disposed to deal with the Yanquis. I have been at my estate in Guadalajara, so I have not personally—"

"The hell you say!" exploded Hunk Gardiner.

Sometimes he was Hunk, you understand, and sometimes Hallowell Adams, III. Now he was Hunk.

He bounded to his feet. He was twenty pounds heavier than before he went to the city, but he could still bounce as though on a trampoline.

"Let's sign, and then Dan Somers and I will interview this human hole in our acreage," he stated. "We will thank you to tell Monte to follow us there."

LESS than an hour later we were skipping from peak to peak of the dirt trail which actually curved around every single hut in Huabrache. Their walls were made of poles set an inch apart, the roofs of thatched palm leaves. These huts were set higgledy-piggledy, wherever a man had a mind to put one, and faced in every direction. So there was no main road at all—just a trail twisting and turning on itself. A main road running north and south through the Tampico field was almost a mile from the settlement itself, but Huabrache was as it had been for hundreds of years.

It did have an open space which did duty as a plaza, and on one side of it was Sarolla's cantina and on the other his mill for grinding grain. And in the soft light of early evening it looked as though every Mexican for miles around was gathered in front of the open-air bar of the cantina. Half were standing, the other half squatting in the near vicinity.

Silence fell, and a hundred men turned to watch us as our toolpusher ground toward the cantina.

Sensing a thicker resentment in the air than customarily greeted American interlopers in Mexico in those days, I said: "They've been hashing over our deal, and don't like it. Five hundred acres more or less doesn't make too much difference. If he's tough—"

"The hell it doesn't," rasped Gardiner, glinting blue eyes playing over that crowd of peons and *vaqueros*. "There isn't oil everywhere; there is some somewhere on this reservation; and six different rockhounds say that right in this vicinity is the surest shot in the acreage—and maybe the whole Tampico field! The Grisham fault meets—"

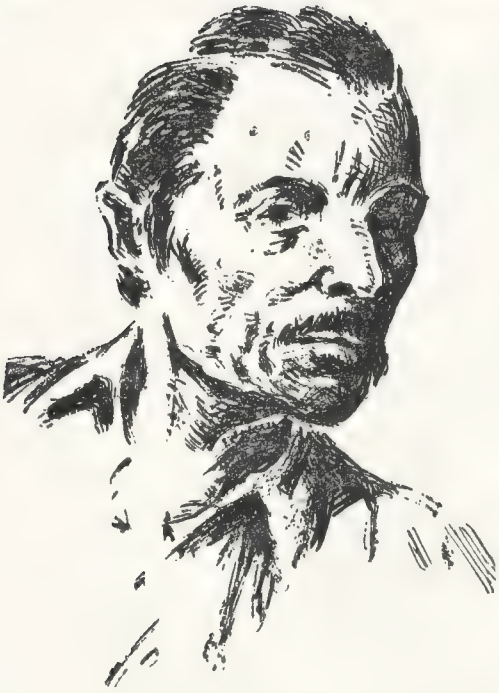
He stopped talking as the mob scene in front of the bar split in the middle, as though to leave an aisle to the bar. Some of the Mexicans were drunk but no one spoke as I swung the toolpusher to a stop directly in front of that impromptu corridor. The thatched roof of the cantina swept down over the open-air counter, and ended fifteen feet beyond it. The top of the toolpusher was brushing the palm leaves.

Behind the bar were a boy of eighteen or so, and an older man with deep lines in his face and hollow eyes. He couldn't have been more than twenty-five or so, but there was suffering there which had aged him. From Don Alvarado's description, this was Pedro Sarolla.

"I'll buy *cerveza* for everybody!" boomed Gardiner. "If the kid can serve it, Pedro, how about a little chat?"

There was a murmur as those who knew English translated for the benefit of the greater number who did not. Evidently none of these men worked around the field, although the distant roaring of several wells, and the hum of traffic on the main road was plainly audible.

In that part of the country there were several wells with so much gas pressure that the only way to salvage the oil was to divert the flow to a horizontal pipe, and let the gas smack against a backboard. Then the drops of oil



The older man with the deep lines in his face and hollow eyes must have been Pedro Sarolla.

in it ran down the board, and through a ditch into a sump-hole dug in the ground to hold oil. You could hear any one of these wells ten miles away.

In general I disapproved of Hunk's lordly way of summoning Sarolla to him, but on the other hand I was glad to stay in the toolpusher with my foot on the starter. A lot of those Mexicans had machetes at their belts, and other wicked weapons were strapped to the saddles of a couple of dozen horses tethered to nearby trees. And a Mexican is no better, and sometimes worse, than the next man when drinking.

Well, the man with gray streaks in his hair and that old-young face limped around the bar bringing three bottles of beer for himself and us, and the younger man started to set open bottles along the bar.

"Your health," Gardiner said, and he grinned that sunny grin which lights up the countryside for miles around. It did not warm up the cantina, however.

We all took a swig, and as we did so I looked sideways at the bar and saw two Mexicans spit in a bottle of beer and throw it away. In those days, as some of you know, Americans got off the streets of oilfield cities and towns on the Cinco de Mayo, which is their Fourth of July. Right or wrong, and probably it was a little of both, you can't blink the fact that at that time most Mexicans resented our presence in the Tampico fields. They thought we were robbing them and their country, and for all I know, maybe we were. They seemed to like the Germans and Dutch, and tolerate the British, but we were the trouble in their tortillas, and no mistake.

Of course things are a lot different now, but then the Tampico fields were a boil coming to a head. When it finally suppurated some time later, revolutionary armies went through the fields and destroyed wells the way a swarm of locusts does a field of corn.

Getting oil out of the ground was the simplest part of being in the oil business then.

"What's all this about your not wanting to let me drill wells on your land, and give you an eighth of all I make?" Hunk roared jovially. "I've got the concession from Mexico City, and here it is. I've got Don Alvarado's signature, and here that is. And here's a lease for you to sign—"

"No."

There was an instant of absolute silence, save for the hum of that roaring field, coming from miles away. Then the audience sort of sighed.

"Why not?" snapped Gardiner, completely unafraid of that in the air which might suddenly congeal into something solid enough to hurt us. "You can't drill yourself—"

"I must wait for my friend, Jingle Bill," Sarolla said simply.

"Why?"

"Because I promised him."

Pedro Sarolla, bareheaded and coatless, with sandals on his feet and dirty overalls on his legs, stared into the distance as though seeing visions. His gaunt cheeks were flushed, and he had the look of a man being torn apart inside. His tangled hair fell over his eyes, and he looked like a wild thing.

A YOUNG fellow, obviously pretty drunk, poked his head into the car on Hunk's side. He looked to have every sort of blood in him from Negro to white, including all the shades of brown. He had mean little crossed eyes set in a thin, mean face.

"We don't want gringos around," he said in broken English. "This is where we live—the queecker you go, the better for you!"

"Who's this guy?" Hunk asked Sarolla contemptuously.

"Go on away, Juan," Sarolla said wearily.

"Why should I go away? I am Juan Berela, as good as anybody, and I do not like the Yanquis telling me what to do—"

"Beat it and have another drink," Hunk snapped.

He gave the pig-eyed drunk one mighty shove which sent him staggering ten feet back-

ward into the arms of the crowd. Berela gave us one venomous look and walked away, muttering to himself.

"Where and when did you make these promises?" Gardiner asked. "To say nothing of why?"

"In Africa," Sarolla said.

The answer knocked Hunk speechless for a moment. Then all he could say was: "Huh? Ten years ago, I suppose—"

"Less than two months ago," Sarolla said quietly, and then coughed—hard. "When we heard of the oil here, I came at once, and Jingle Bill said he would follow as soon as he sold some things in Kimberley—"

"Diamonds?" guffawed Hunk.

His wild-bull-of-the-prairie side was the wrong thing for him to use under the circumstances, I felt, but somehow that shining giant was keeping the crowd intent on him—and motionless.

"No. He did not do well around Kimberley. He did better in Johannesburg with gold, until he got drunk that time," Sarolla said calmly.

There was a little rustle of conversation, and some smiles among the Mexicans.

Then Sarolla went on, "Furthermore I have had a letter from him from Havana, and just yesterday from Vera Cruz. He will be here any day—any hour. He said so."

His liquid voice trailed away, and he coughed again as he stared past us on out into the monte. His face was intent, almost sad, as though recollections of something thousands of miles away were affecting him.

Then I saw him glance up, and leap backward. He spat something in Spanish, his face suddenly convulsed. I looked beyond Hunk and saw a horse crowding against the car on that side. I couldn't see the rider's face, but I did see him draw a machete from the other side of his saddle.

Hunk lunged toward me, and I leaped out of my side of the car. As I did so, the very drunk young man whom Hunk had pushed was sweeping the machete upward behind him, preparing for a swipe at Hunk.

I never went through anything quite like the second that followed. Hunk was sputtering amazed curses. The audience stood like statues, as though watching a show. Sarolla's mouth was working, but no words came.

The machete stuck for a moment in the thatched roof of the cantina. My hands leaped to my guns, but I didn't draw. Instead, I dragged the rider from the saddle. As he fell, the machete came loose from the roof, and fell to the ground close to his hand. Still prone on the ground, he reached for it. Just as he grasped it, I stamped on his hand.

The sharp edge of the blade was turned down, and I cut off the tip of his little finger as neat as you please.

The next second I was backed against the car, with blood spurting all over my boots. I had both guns in my hands, and as Sarolla burst into a frantic torrent of Spanish I yelled, "Don't move—anybody!"

I spat out the words in English. I knew Spanish, but until I sort of got my feet on the ground in Mexico I had found it convenient to pretend I couldn't speak the language.

Hunk was roaring around the car, preceded by blue smoke curling from his cursing mouth. Not a Mexican moved. It was uncanny. My victim was resting on an elbow, gazing stupidly at a little finger which was spurting blood like Old Faithful.

There were several beer bottles on the bar, and that aisle which had opened up between us and Pedro was still there. I took four shots, two with each hand. I never could shoot like my daddy could, but he'd taught me a little about drawing and guns, so I was fortunate enough to knock over the four beer bottles on my left.

It was a grandstand play, made in the hope that it would get us a little respect. And it seemed to work.

"I'd hate to have to shoot anybody," I said. "So take it easy."

Hunk was bending over the young fellow whose little finger I had amputated. And still no one in that crowd of sullen-faced, somewhat bewildered peons moved or spoke.

I looked at Pedro Sarolla. He was staring down at the lessening fountain of blood gushing from that finger as Hunk twisted a tourniquet of string around it. Sarolla's eyes were wide and sort of blank, with a curious light in them. His face was twisted a little, and he licked lips which were stretched into a grimace.

That geyser of blood seemed to have a hypnotic fascination for him.

Hunk had wrapped his handkerchief around the youth's finger on top of the tourniquet. Then he rose to his feet like a grizzly bear coming up on his hind legs. Those blue eyes were blindingly bright, and he crouched just a little as he ranged himself alongside my smoking guns. He never carried a gun himself.

Silent as the grave, the two of us faced a blank, terrible wall of silence. Mysterious behind it, and protected by it, were those stony faces, and in the air was a sort of miasma which I could smell as plainly as I can those stinking swamps along the Amazon and in the Dutch East Indies.

I sort of felt what was going on in their minds, as you can when you deal with hostile natives in our business. They hated our guts. And yet we were from the outside world, with resources and strengths different from theirs—strangers with backgrounds to make them think twice before starting anything.

"Tell 'em we're taking this boy to town, and getting a doctor for him. I'll pay for it," Hunk commanded.

Pedro licked his lips and cleared his throat. He was shaking a little and had to cough again before he spoke.

He told them what Hunk had said, and they said exactly nothing. Watching them like an animal trainer would so many lions in an arena, I saw dozens of pairs of black eyes shift to look past me. Then I heard hoofbeats. I took time to glance over my shoulder, and saw a very welcome sight indeed.

Two horsemen were riding toward us, and one was Monte Mathews. The other was one of Don Alvarado's peons.

I put away my guns, and kept an eye on the gang as Hunk went to meet Monte. He gave our production manager a rough resume of the situation as they walked toward us, the customary two guns swinging at Monte's thighs.

RIDING Pullmans from field to field and living a lot in hotels hadn't softened Monte up. He was still built of whipcord and wire, and at his worst he began where most men leave off with guns and horses and sheer savvy out in the wide open spaces. He was also one of the best practical oilmen that ever lived.

Monte sure was a startling sight for those peons to see as he came forward alertly, his copper-colored face adorned with a ruthless sort of smile and amazing eyes as wide and watchful as a stalking wolf's.

He was quarter Indian, and was a composite of all the pictures you've ever seen of Indian chiefs. What made his appearance downright sensational were eyes of such a light gray color that they were almost white, and prematurely white hair.

He was as tall as Hunk—six foot two barefooted—and very slim. Outwardly he had the iron control of his Indian blood. You didn't have to know him long, though, to realize that a lot of the time he was repressing a riot of emotion within him. I often thought that controling all the heat inside him had made that hair white.

He grinned at me—we'd been closer than brothers since we teamed up against Hunk in Sepulveda in 1907—and then put his hands on his hips and gazed over the crowd.

"It appears that you are in the hands of the Philistines," he said to me in the curiously stilted manner in which he always talked except when he was mad.

He had spent his youth among the Indians, taught by a grandmother who had been stolen by them and who had married one. Consequently Biblical references and quotations were frequent with him, and his manner of speech had been affected by Biblical prose.

"I'll Philistine 'em!" Hunk Gardiner exploded. "Sarolla here refuses to give us a lease on his acreage—stalling around that he's got to wait for some partner of his to get in from Africa, for God's sake—"

"I have heard from him. He will arrive from Vera Cruz any moment, *señor!*" Sarolla protested. "I promised him—"

"The hell you say!" Gardiner advanced a step. The crowd just watched. "We need this land to operate properly—it's got the best water supply, the very center of our acreage—everything else! What's the matter with you birds? We come in here, bring millions out of the ground, make your country rich, do something for the world, and what do you do? You people that are still plowing with forked sticks, by God!"

At that time Hunk was not what might be called a tactful ambassador to more backward peoples. He warmed to his thesis—the sincere thesis which he holds to this day. He bent over the shrinking, delicate Sarolla like a St. Bernard looking down at a whippet.

"I'll tell you what you do! You sulk and sabotage and start revolutions against every government that deals with us—you dynamite wells and do everything you can to make it hard for the men and the business and the country that are trying to do something for your flee-bitten peons and the land you don't even know how to use! Look at most of these people, Sarolla—you've been around. Know what we can do for these folks right here?"

He was in full career—face glowing, red hair shooting off sparks, magnetism so strong in him that I swear you could feel a physical pull inside yourself.

"We can make you personally rich, give them all the work they can do at more pesos a day cash than they ever see in a month, and help them and their land amount to something! Don Alvarado can sign—but you can't, and these peons back you up! Well, you're going to sign, Señor Sarolla, and sign right now or—"

"It may be that myself and Jingle Bill would like to get our own oil from our own land," Sarolla said nervously.

Monte glanced at me with a flashlight grin I had to return, worried as I was. For twelve years or so before, when Hunk Gardiner was High Poobah of Petroleum in Oklahoma, Monte Mathews had said the same thing to Gardiner that Sarolla was saying now: that some men like to be in business for themselves.

I got to feeling sort of on Pedro's side. He looked so frail and sick you felt sorry for him. He kept shifting his eyes from Hunk's face to my blood-soaked boots.

"How can you drill your land? Where are you going to get money for a rig?" Hunk snorted. "If you get the money, where can you buy a rig? If you can buy it, who's going to drill your wells for you? Why—"

"Señor Gardiner!"

Sarolla's voice cracked like a whip. He drew himself up, and threw back his head proudly.

"Once and for all, I will not deal with you until my friend arrives! And for your own safety, I should advise you and your friends to leave, and later—"

Then it happened, in less time than it takes to speak this sentence.

The last I'd seen of the young man with the machete had been when he was surrounded with a half dozen of his friends. They had been pouring tequila down his throat.

Now he burst out of the ring of men, screaming something. He was like a Moro I saw go amok in the Philippines—eyes wild, and almost frothing at the mouth.

As he leaped toward us, Monte and I both went for our guns. But by the time we had them out, Hunk Gardiner was between us and our target. Instead of retreating, the unarmed redhead had jumped forward. He leaped to one side as the machete swished at him, and hit that insane peon a punch behind the ear that would have crumpled a water buffalo.

The drunk fell forward, completely out. Monte, speaking so quietly that only his blank-looking eyes showed that he had been ready to kill, said, "Jesus, Hunk, why did you do that?"

"If you birds had killed him, it would have made this bunch tougher to do business with," Hunk said in a matter-of-fact bellow. He turned to Sarolla.

"Come on now, Pedro," he said.

Sarolla did not answer for a moment, but watched the unconscious man's friends pick him up and carry him off into the gathering darkness. Two or three looked over their shoulders at the three of us, and their faces were not good to see. The rest of the crowd was like a prejudiced jury, eyeing defendants personally repulsive to them.

I knew then that Huabrache was a hostile core in our little two-thousand-acre empire, and that the nucleus of that core would be the pure poison of that young man and his family or friends.

Even with Monte and Hunk alongside me, I do not mind telling you that the shadowed world around me seemed full of foreign devils, and that I was suddenly afraid. Afraid of that moment, afraid of the days ahead, afraid of all that I sensed lay ahead of us before we dragged oil from the depths of Mexico.

There was a full half minute of utter silence.

I'll never forget it, nor what followed.

It was dark now and the kid behind the bar had lit a couple of gasoline torches. The faraway roar of those gassy wells suddenly increased as one of the headers came on. A header is a well in which the gas pressure has to gather for an interval before it can force itself and any oil it may bear to the surface. Consequently it flows at regular intervals.

Your face looks swell, feels better yet
When you shave with a Thin Gillette.
This blade saves time and dough what's more—
For one dime buys a pack of four!
TONITE!
PHOTOGRAPH YOUR OWN PIN-UP GIRL!
Made of easy-flexing steel hard enough to cut glass
THIN
Gillette
BLADES
4 for 10¢
Produced By The Maker Of The Famous Gillette Blue Blade

So the deep bass note, like the song of the fields, grew in power, increased, and the lights came on, and the crowd stirred.

From behind the cantina partition came a voice so deep and husky—like the ones you sometimes hear from sideshow barkers—that it made the hackles rise along your spine.

"Greetings and salutations," it said.

Pedro Sarolla gave a little gasp, and the crowd turned like one man. Through the curtained doorway in the partition stepped the most fabulous character who ever passed through the Tampico fields—perhaps the most fantastic adventurer ever known to this fantastic business.

CHAPTER II

JINGLE BILL

WHILE he was greeting one and all with smiling ease, and Pedro prattled on like a child to its long-lost father, Hunk and Monte and I stood abreast, our backs against the toolpusher, and absorbed Jingle Bill—sometimes called Jungle Bill.

For an hombre supposed to be fresh from Africa by way of Havana and Vera Cruz he was somewhat unconventionally dressed. In fact, he was scarcely dressed at all.

His sweat-stained shirt was torn and splotched, his overalls likewise. He wore no socks, and his straw sandals were just about worn through. His overalls were held up by the belt of his pistol holster, and into that belt was stuck a machete, stained with fairly fresh blood, and a hunting knife. What looked to be a long-barreled .38 was in the holster, which was tied to his leg and had no top flap.

He seemed to know everyone, and was gripping shoulders and patting backs with a curiously noncommittal benevolence. He was like a king, graciously but impersonally greeting anonymous subjects who mean nothing to him as individual persons.

All, that is, except Sarolla. He put his arm around Pedro, who eyed him as though Jingle Bill had thrown a spell over him. I would have given much then to know what had gone on in Africa. I was to find out before long, and it was not pretty.

I'd have said then that Jingle Bill was about thirty-five, but later I had a feeling that he was fifty years old in terms of years, twenty-five in terms of body, and ageless in mind.

The three of us were tall men, but he was at least six-foot-four, with shoulders and a V-shaped torso in such perfect proportion that you had to get alongside him to realize how tall he was. His hair was cornsilk blond, brushed straight back above a square, deeply burned face which did not have a single line

He was somewhat unconventionally dressed. In fact, he was scarcely dressed at all.

on it. It was as bland and open as though he had never thought a thought or committed a sin. His jaw was a little heavy, and his wide mouth smiled a good deal, showing teeth as big and white as those of a giant wolf. He never laughed.

We found out later that his Dutch grandfather had married a Javanese girl.

His eyes were slanted upward just a little, which made him striking physically. But as he strode up to us at the head of an army which had instantly accepted his leadership, I saw that the eyes themselves were more remarkable than the sockets. They were gray, and ageless, and fathomless, as though you were looking into a miniature world entirely different from the one we live in. You had the feeling that he looked at this one with slightly amused contempt, and at you personally as though you were one of a troop of toy soldiers he was playing with.

He planted himself before us on trunk-like legs, eyeing us with slow, unruffled appraisal. He gave the effect of smiling, but his lips hadn't moved.

Monte Mathews gestured at the crowd which had ranged itself solidly behind the newcomer. It was funny, but Monte and Jingle Bill seemed to sense that they were natural antagonists.

"You seem to rate, in Huabrache," Monte said evenly.

"When I passed through before"—the blond giant smiled—"this section was being terrorized by a bandit called the Butcher Bird—a mostly

white and blood-crazy character. I was fortunate enough to track him down and kill him—"

"With his bare hands!" Sarolla interrupted excitedly. "And the Butcher Bird had a machete!"

"I also got one of his men whom I'd crippled to lead me to his hidden loot. I gave back to these people what the Butcher Bird had taken, and used the rest for a fiesta right here at Pedro's father's cantina."

He smiled reminiscently.

"The whole countryside was drunk," he stated, while chuckles ran through the crowd. "I was drunkest. I walked around for three days and nights with so many pesos clinking in my pockets that ever since they have called me Jingle Bill. It took me thirty-five years to learn I could get that drunk."

He glanced down at his clothes, and said, "Ran into bandits only twenty miles from here, and they stripped me. I was lucky to get back my gun." He touched his bloodstained machete. "It wasn't completely onesided. When I got here I saw what was going on, so I sneaked into the back room and listened. I'll look the situation over and in a day or two we'll talk it over."

"How does it look?" Gardiner said sardonically.

"Little bad for you," Jingle Bill said. "From what I overheard, you need us a lot more than we need you. An eighth royalty is undoubtedly your first offer, made as a basis for discussion."

Gardiner eyed him sharply. Monte nudged me.

"The hell it is," boomed Hunk. "That's standard royalty for the individual landholder. What can you do without us?"

"Drill ourselves. Or suppose we got bids on our five hundred acres from the big companies?"

Again Hunk eyed him. Jingle Bill, ragged and bloody as he was against this primitive setting, acted as though he were sitting at a desk in a New York office. Hunk Gardiner turned into Hallowell Adams Gardiner, III.

"Our leases surround this acreage completely," he said evenly, keeping control of himself. "Your right-of-way is merely a courtesy. You have no legal exit or entrance across our land. A big company will give you no more than I will."

"Not even a bonus?" Jingle Bill asked.

I had a sudden feeling that maybe Tampico and the field and this torchlit group of men in this remote little settlement in the monte weren't real at all. Huabrache was on a little rise, and I could see, far away, a pale splotch against the sky thrown there by the lights of Tampico—such a boomtown as had never been seen before and perhaps never will be again. And I thought of all the blood and sweat and treachery and toil going on fifty miles to the north, and fifty miles to the south of me—of the revolution and conspiracy and murder, and of the billions pouring out of the ground to drive men mad.

And how many scenes as tense as this one were going on between grimy men elsewhere in the brooding monte, men battling frantically, according to their lights, for what was theirs or what they could steal! And between others, in Tampico, and London and New York and Amsterdam, quietly discussing the disposition of an ocean of oil which men like us, strangers in an alien and hostile land, dragged out of the ground with little more than our bare hands.

What made the scene more real than the voices of Jingle Bill and Hunk, or the roar of the wild wells, was the clean, strong scent of petroleum, drifting across the jungle and drowning out the fragrance of the semi-tropical undergrowth.

"Not even a bonus," Hunk repeated.

"You threaten to deny us, or any lessee, right of way into this acreage?" Jingle Bill asked calmly.

"Exactly. We don't want trouble but we won't be held up."

Jingle Bill showed his big wolf's teeth, literally and figuratively.

"Do you think we—or any competitor of yours we leased to—would let you get away with it?" he asked casually.

As though to illustrate what he meant, Jingle Bill touched the butt of his gun lightly. Monte stepped forward, facing him. That put him right alongside me.

"You hinting at gunplay?" Monte asked softly.

"If necessary," Bill smiled.

"We're not too bad at that ourselves," Monte said. "I'm not going to shoot, but just to show you—"

His hands moved almost too fast to follow. So did Jingle Bill's.

Now I never could draw like my daddy could, but he'd taught me a lot and I had sort of advance warning. So my gun was sticking in Jingle Bill's ribs just as he was drawing, and just as Monte was bringing his gun up.

The blond giant looked at me, and his smile was a mile wide.

"You're good, kid," he said. Then he grinned at Monte. "You, too. I guess if we ever duel I'd better choose other weapons."

"Nothing like knowing where everybody stands," Mathews said. "Better still if we can get together—"

He stopped speaking as though a hand had been slapped over his mouth.

A dull boom came rolling over the jungle. It was dynamite. No one moved or spoke as a second explosion was followed by still a third.

"Those greaser swine are blowing up wells again!" roared Gardiner. "Get going!"

IN A matter of seconds the three of us were in the seat of the toolpusher. Every oilman in Mexico had sworn, just a week before, to rally round the next time some roving band of cutthroats sabotaged a well and to take otherwise non-existent law into our own hands.

The blast had come from the vicinity of the wild wells, not far from the sizable town of Farazan. All the oil camps would be notified by telephone, and if everybody lived up to their promises, every last footpath for miles around would be prowled by embattled roughnecks.

"I haven't heard of any main revolutionary army operating around here," I said as I sent the toolpusher bouncing for the main road.

"If it's one of these small-time gangs, we'll string 'em up if it takes a posse of every last man in these fields!" Hunk snarled.

"I wouldn't blame you," a voice came from the rear of the little truck, and Jingle Bill thrust his head through the back of the cab. "Thought I'd come along."

"We can use you," growled Hunk. "Maybe we could use you longer than tonight. Know anything about oil?"

"Born in the Dutch East Indies and spent two years in Texas," Jingle Bill said tranquilly. "I know *all* about oil. But you seem to have me wrong," Bill said. "Maybe *I* can use *you*."

If any of us had been disposed to hold Jingle Bill lightly, I think we got over it then. Not even Hunk had a word to say as we tore into the highway.

The ruts in this so-called main road were deeper than those in the trail we'd just left, but we could make fair time by getting the wheels in the ruts and keeping them there. Traffic was thick as wagons and trucks carrying an endless stream of supplies made a thin line in both directions. Those dynamitings had everybody stepping on the throttle or whipping up the horses, so we made the terrific oilfield speed of fifteen miles an hour.

A crossroad led to a piece of Texas Company acreage with twenty derricks on it. The word passed that dynamite had been dropped into two producing wells and another about to come in. The wild wells were in the same general vicinity.

The flow of supplies must not stop, so drivers stayed with their vehicles. But extra men dropped off, and there were thirty of us at the crossroad—all mad, and scared, too—when I crashed the toolpusher through some brush and got it off the road.

Just as Hunk Gardiner was starting to take command, Kid Laird and his son, Young Kid Laird, came galloping down the side road. Their horses were in a lather, and so were they. They were drillers for Texas, and inseparable at work or play.

Young Kid threw himself off his horse. The Kid himself, who ordinarily looked like a benevolent bulldog, sat still and he didn't look benevolent now.

"They killed Sam Fogarty on Texas Number Six," he growled, low in his throat. "About twenty in the gang, all masked—"

"The Dutch Shell bunch in Camp Eight turned 'em back in this direction," gasped Young Kid. 'The boys are out for miles around, loaded for bear. Get yourselves some horses—"

"Let's get these bums alive if we can," shouted Hunk. "And find out what makes 'em tick before we hang 'em."

We swarmed down the road, unharnessed horses from all kinds of wagons, and pretty soon everybody was mounted bareback, and Kid Laird and his son who knew every foot of the country, were passing out assignments. Myself and Jingle Bill were handed a little side trail which led past one of those wild wells. We arranged a signal—three shots with a count of five between them meant quarry sighted and *help!*

I don't mind saying that I felt good having Jingle Bill with me on that back trail through the forest. We talked very little—just listened and strained to see in the dark.

We hadn't sighted a thing when we came to the big clearing where one of the wild wells—a header—had just quit blowing off steam.

Then, just as the header died, Jingle Bill gripped my arm. Two men galloped out of the woods and rode in a half circle toward us. They stayed close to the protection of the forest. And in the bright moonlight, we could see that they wore masks.

We stayed in the shadow of the jungle.

"We'll ride them down from the side as they pass. Knock them off their horses and get them alive," Bill whispered.

There was something Olympian about his calm. He was neither exultant nor excited nor scared, as far as I could see. The way he talked and acted, the two desperate fugitives galloping toward us might have been mailmen.

As I said, the men were riding in the open, but clinging very close to the monte. They were probably looking for the breach in which Jingle Bill and I were concealed. The monte was so thick that one would have to hack his way through with a machete if he didn't stick to the trail.

They were less than thirty yards from us when something happened to my horse. Some insect must have stung him. Anyway, he just leaped forward, into the open.

The two guerrillas were galloping straight toward me, and saw me instantly.

As one man they turned their horses out into the clearing and dashed for the trail from

which they had emerged on the other side of the clearing.

Three shots rang out behind me as Jingle Bill fired the signal. There were barely audible shouts and shots from the depths of the jungle on all sides of us, it seemed. The embattled oilmen were swarming like locusts all through that territory.

I found myself galloping like mad on a course which would intersect that of the fugitives. They fired a couple of shots at us, but they didn't even come close. Their horses were better than ours, from the looks of them, but they were also very weary animals.

Jingle Bill, smiling benevolently and riding like a centaur, was right beside me. Straight ahead of our quarry was the horizontal pipe from the wild well. The three-sided concrete backwall that trapped the oil was set twenty feet from the mouth of the pipe. A sloping concrete flooring guided the oil into a wide ditch which led into a storage sump, perhaps a hundred feet square, which had been dug in the ground.

We angled our course to meet the desperadoes just before they reached the pipe, which was set about five feet off the ground. Our guns were in our hands, but we didn't want to shoot them unless we had to. I had an idea they'd give up pretty easily when we got on top of them.

We overhauled them more quickly than I had expected. As they galloped straight across the space between pipe and backwall, we were within five feet of them, gaining with every jump. We had the drop on them and could have written our names on their backs with bullets by the time they could turn and shoot.

One of them looked back at us, and I gestured to him with my gun to surrender. Bill was crowding up on one side of them, I on the other.

Then the world fell on us.

With a mighty roar the header came on again.

Kid Laird and his son, Young Kid Laird, were drillers from Texas, inseparable at work or play.

A huge jet of gas blew out of that pipe and smacked the four of us like a concentrated tornado.

IT SWEPT us off our horses as though a scythe had mowed us down. Of course Bill and I were riding bareback—but how it happened that neither of those Mexicans' feet caught in his stirrups I'll never be able to explain.

I hit the slippery, deeply-angled flooring with a force that knocked most of the breath

out of me. I was a dazed, weak member of a quartet so inextricably tangled up with each other that we must have looked like an octopus having a fit.

The roaring stream of gas and oil was just high enough to miss the horses, so they galloped on.

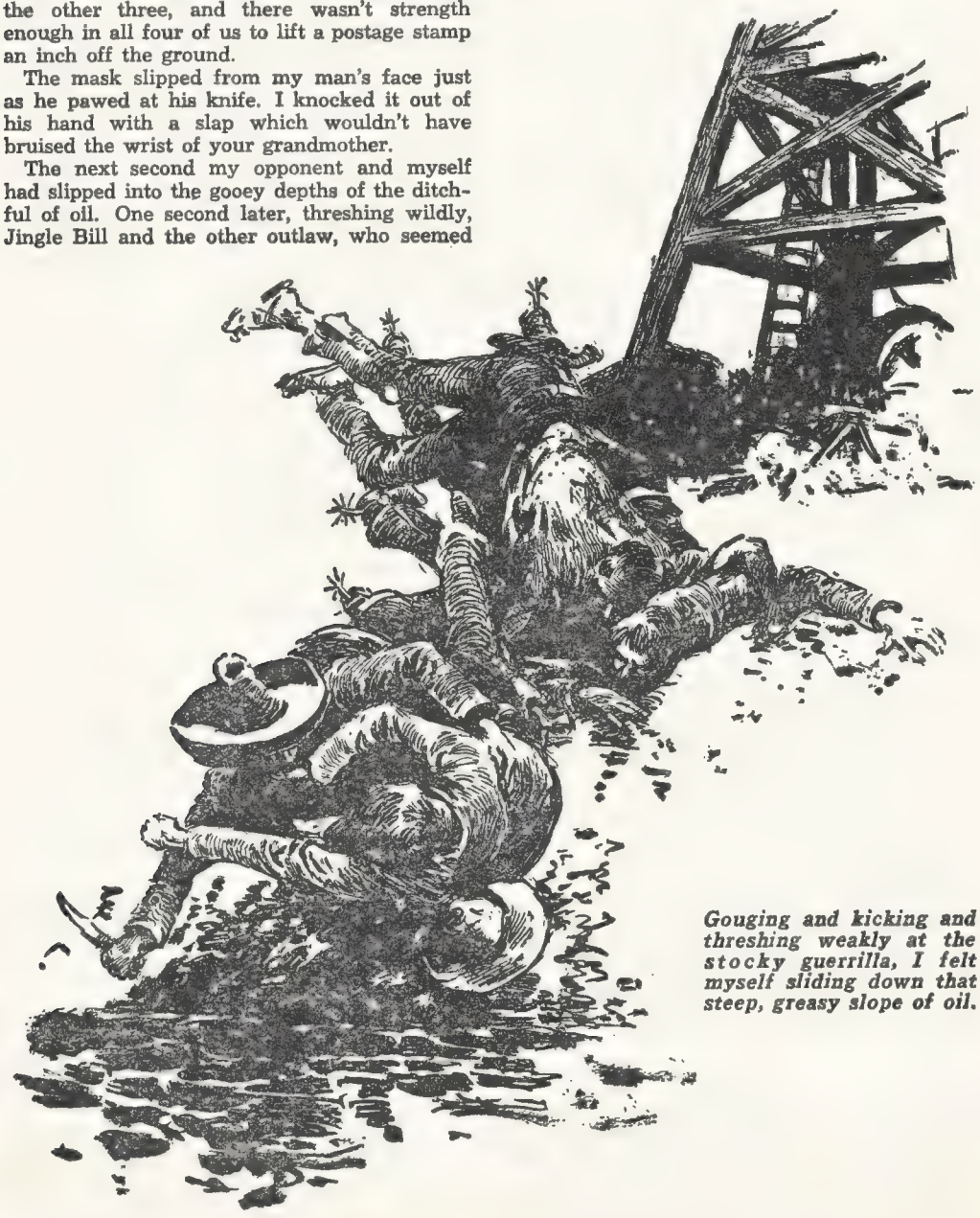
Gouging and kicking and threshing weakly at the stocky guerrilla who was almost on top of me, I felt myself sliding down that greasy slope of oil. The same thing was happening to the other three, and there wasn't strength enough in all four of us to lift a postage stamp an inch off the ground.

The mask slipped from my man's face just as he pawed at his knife. I knocked it out of his hand with a slap which wouldn't have bruised the wrist of your grandmother.

The next second my opponent and myself had slipped into the gooey depths of the ditchful of oil. One second later, threshing wildly, Jingle Bill and the other outlaw, who seemed unconscious, plumped into the river of petroleum alongside us.

I staggered to my feet, pawing the viscous mess from my eyes and nose and mouth. My strength was returning, and I dragged my Mex partner upright. He had a mouthful of oil and seemed to be strangling to death, which was all right with me.

Jingle Bill and I both tried to say something, but all we could manage was a series



Gouging and kicking and threshing weakly at the stocky guerrilla, I felt myself sliding down that steep, greasy slope of oil.

of gurgles and cooings unbecoming to grown men.

We were absolutely black from head to foot, and adorned with a large variety of local flora and fauna which had been trapped on the surface of the oil. A big yellow moth landed on Jingle Bill's forehead while I watched. Somehow it looked so rakish perched over his right eye that I started to laugh.

He smiled, those big white teeth flashing out of his blackened face. He gestured at me, and then lifted his unconscious victim above the surface of the oil, and threw him ashore. He waded over to help me, and together we heaved my strangling Mexican toward shore, only three feet away.

At that second, our man went limp in our arms. I found myself staring down at a large bullet hole in his head.

Jingle Bill and I looked up simultaneously. Not ten feet from us, a masked man on horseback was taking careful aim with a rifle. Between the roar of the well and ears plugged with oil, I was completely deaf and so was Bill. Our vision was at half mast, too, due to the oil in our eyes.

Jingle Bill was a little behind me. My remaining gun was useless, of course, soaked in petroleum. The rider, realizing our helplessness, was drawing a leisurely bead on me.

I figured that I had only a second or two to live.

Then, I was sure I was dreaming the whole thing. For the desperado's mouth dropped open, and very slowly the rifle fell from his hands. His horse reared a little, and like a picture in slow motion, the outlaw slid to the ground. As he fell, the moonlight glinted from about two inches of knifeblade. The other four inches were imbedded squarely in his heart.

I turned to look at Jingle Bill. He was examining a tiny cut on the ball of his thumb. He was as calm as though he'd just nicked himself opening a can of beans.

He made the gesture of drawing his knife and throwing it as he lisped and gurgled, "Cut mysel' when I thoo it."

I spit some petroleum and an ossified beetle out of my mouth, but I couldn't say a word. If I could have, I'd have said that I realized now why he was sometimes called Jungle Bill.

Then we floundered ashore. Just as we hauled ourselves to dry land a horseman burst out of the jungle. In hot pursuit came Kid and Young Kid Laird.

The guerrilla turned and took a shot at Kid. Young Kid shot back, and the Mexican's horse tumbled end over end. And when it lay still, it was no stiller than the body of the rider.

The Laird Kids were so intent on their victim that I guess they didn't notice Jingle Bill and me for a moment. Bill picked up the Mexican he had knocked cold, and carried him like a baby as he walked toward the Lairds.

They were stooping over their man. When they looked up and saw us striding toward them, they were the two most startled men I ever saw.

JUST then the gasser died. I had dredged out my mouth sufficiently to yell, "Don't shoot—I'm Dan Somers of Border Pete!"

Then they started to laugh. We were adding new bugs to our collection every moment as they landed on us and stuck in the oil. Young Kid Laird, a perky little Boston bull alongside his father, rolled back on the ground and laughed himself into the blind staggers.

Then we compared notes, and the Kid took a look at our captive. When he spoke his voice grated like steel against gravel.

"Boys, this guy is a captain in the Federal garrison at Farazan! No wonder they wore masks!"

Just then the bandit who had been thrown from his horse stirred a little and mumbled. We were all on him like so many wolves.

What we threatened to do to him wasn't pretty, and soon he gasped out the truth.

A detachment of specially recruited, very irregular Farazan troops had blown up the wells, all right, at the direction of a regular army officer.

"Then the *jefe* said he would go to the oil companies and arrange to raise a special army to protect them from such incidents as tonight. We would all be well paid by the companies, he said—"

"And he himself would graft on everything from the last grain of corn to the officers' swords!" spat Kid Laird. "By God, boys, when we get together in Farazan there's going to be a meeting that will shake this damned country until they'll feel it in China!"

I had a feeling that big things were in the making—that the oil companies and the Mexican population of the Tampico fields who had been rushing toward each other, head-on, were finally about to collide. What the end would be no man could say, except that he would feel it in his pocketbook and maybe in his wounded body.

All of us except Jingle Bill were squatting around the frightened peon, digesting the implications in what he had revealed. Finally I looked up at the man who had saved my life, and was determined to fight me to the death for that five-hundred-acre sore on the body of our lease.

White teeth and slant eyes shining in his black face, the towering adventurer looked like some sardonic god out of the mysterious fastnesses of the Far East. Even then his words had some of the sound of a threat as he said, "Looks as though a man might do all right for himself around here!"

CHAPTER III

"LET'S GET DRUNK BUT NOT DRAMATIC"

THE Lairds' camp wasn't very far away, and we went there with our captives. Jingle Bill and I gradually emerged from our coating of petroleum and other substances, and we went on into Farazan in borrowed clothes. We left our prisoners behind, guarded by a Texas boy with a pair of ivory-butted six-shooters, who wouldn't miss if the saboteurs made a break.

There were only two cantinas on the plaza which foreigners would patronize, and we found all the lads, including Hunk and Monte, in one of them—a big dancehall-bar place. They were sticking together, and I was personally very glad to be one of a large group instead of a small one. I'm a little shy in foreign countries.

Wild stories of what had happened that night were all over Farazan, and the local population threw us dirty looks, but from a distance. Two of the Huasteca boys had been slightly wounded, and a third had been killed by two bandits. The wounded roughnecks were young and enthusiastic, and had hanged the hombres responsible. To make it more impressive, they had strung them up to the limb of an ironwood tree which extended over the main highway into Farazan. The police didn't know which of a hundred of us were responsible, so we were all suspects.

Huasteca swung more influence in Mexico City than any other company, because they were the pioneers in the Tampico field, and consequently the lads weren't too worried. Like the rest, they got madder and madder as the Lairds and I and Jingle Bill whispered the news that Federal officers were responsible for what had happened.

All of a sudden, in the very middle of that big cantina, with the whole front of it open to the crowded plaza, Hunk Gardiner was standing on a table.

There were more important men than Hunk there—Roy Donalds, for instance, terminal superintendent of the big Texas tank farm along the Panuco River, and the general manager of Independent Gas and Oil, and others.

But leave it to Hallowell Adams Gardiner, III, to take the lead.

"Rally round!" came that bull-like bellow.

The Americans gathered from all corners of the cantina, and the Mexicans seemed to coagulate from miles around.

Monte and I just naturally stood underneath Hunk, keeping our eyes on local citizens. Practically every one of them was pure poison that night, including the growing mob around the door. The dancehall girls huddled along the bar. I saw General Alazar, *jefe* of the town, come in with two aides. He was a fat, pock-marked little caballero with squint eyes and a thieving disposition. Half Yaqui Indian, half Spaniard, he didn't have a bone or a thought in his body that wasn't small and crooked.

Hunk obtained silence, and proceeded to tear into the situation as though it were the Yale line.

"Tonight hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of our legal property has been destroyed!" he shouted, and stared straight at the general. "We know who was back of it. And right here, right now, let's announce to every past, present and would-be bandit in this whole field that from now on they won't get away with it! And I've got an idea about how to stop 'em. Anybody interested?"

"Shoot!" yelled Kid Laird, who was working away on his sixth brandy.

"All right—here's the situation," Hunk swept on, glowing like a human torch. In the overhead lights his red hair, sticking up in all directions, was like an aureole of fire. "Mexico City is a long ways away; the Federal government has got all it can handle in the big revolutionary army in the south; and we're on our own. So I say that you big company men see to it that before tomorrow night the big boys in Tampico and New York are sold on the idea of all of us chipping in and financing a private army to protect us, our wells, and the whole damned field—honest Mexicans as well as the rest of us!"

Well, for a second or two everybody was to stunned they couldn't have heard a beer mug drop. Then, as a combined war cry started, Hunk silenced them and rolled on.

"We can get a reliable retired general like Zelaya to recruit and command it; we'll pay and feed the men, and then maybe we can call our souls our own around here! The government will be glad to have a privately financed army up here fighting these murdering bandits who call themselves revolutionists! And they'll thank us double if we can clean up any renegade Federals who may be around!"

He stared straight at General Alazar, and for a full fifteen seconds there was not a sound inside or outside the cantina. Then Hunk, still glaring at Alazar, gave the insult direct. With a space between every word he went on, "I mean the kind of renegade Federal official who destroys our property so he can blackmail us into paying for the protection he's sworn to give us!"

Again that silence. There were more than a hundred of us against all that part of Mexico, so I really wasn't too frightened to keep my teeth from chattering, but that was very tough talk on enemy territory.

The general said something to one of his aides and they all laughed loud but hollow laughs.

In the shadows outside the wide-flung doors, it looked as though every inch of the

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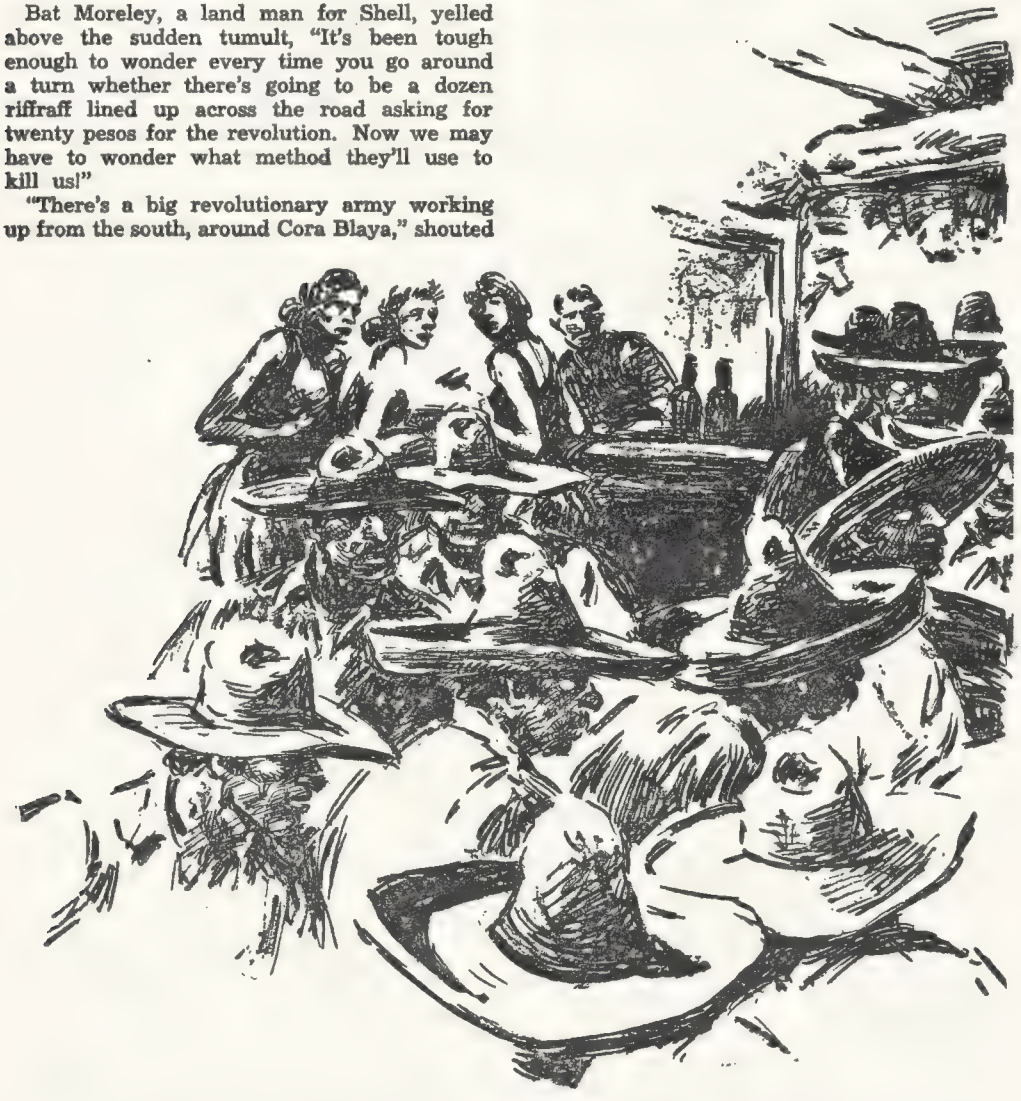
plaza were occupied. Here and there pairs and groups were in violent discourse and there were the sounds of several fights. Policemen shouldered their way into the cantina, and lined up watchfully at the door.

Then it seemed that everybody wanted to talk at once.

Bat Moreley, a land man for Shell, yelled above the sudden tumult, "It's been tough enough to wonder every time you go around a turn whether there's going to be a dozen riffraff lined up across the road asking for twenty pesos for the revolution. Now we may have to wonder what method they'll use to kill us!"

"There's a big revolutionary army working up from the south, around Cora Blaya," shouted



someone in the crowd. "If they ever get here, they'll ruin this field sure as hell!"

Which, as I've said, is exactly what they did a few years later.

"Independent Gas and Oil will meet its fair assessment toward a special army, and I'm in a position to pay it right now without further authority from New York!" bawled Indy's general manager.

Few people there had authority to commit their companies, but everyone was for the idea, so Hunk went on from his lofty perch.

"All right! As a comparatively small independent among big companies, Border Pete and International will announce itself now. International is land poor—but we've got tens of thousands of acres of the best-looking stuff in California, Arkansas, Texas and Louisiana. And Border Pete's got two thousand choice acres down here—"

"Fifteen hundred, you mean!"

It was that great, deep voice of Jingle Bill's. Smiling tranquilly, he'd stopped Hunk in full career.

Hunk stared down at him. Then he laughed. The others looked at Bill appraisingly. Here

All of a sudden, Hunk Gardiner was standing on a table. "Rally round!" he bellowed.

might be the kind of man they could understand, stranger or not. Monte and I grinned at each other understandingly. Bill might have been either one of us, bucking Hunk a little more than ten years before in Sepulveda.

"We've got an argument with half of Mexico right now," boomed Hunk, "so let's not fight among ourselves. Anyhow, what I mean is that I'm bound for Boston tomorrow to raise two million dollars against our acreage, and I'm pulling every rig and crew off our wildcat stuff in the States and shipping 'em down here. I'll be damned if I'm going to be scared out of this field, and I pledge that within one week Border Pete will be ready to throw in its share of the army fund in cash. And the rest of you boys ought to have your company assessments in the kitty long before that! What say?"

WHAT they had to say made the glasses dance behind the bar, and the timbre in that unanimous shout made the swarming peons and *vaqueros,* indoors and out, glance at each other uneasily. The volcano of fears and doubts and repressions in that bunch of men who had drilled for oil in the deserts of Arabia, the jungles of South America, and the swamps of the Dutch East Indies had erupted—and the roar of it was a nasty thing to hear.

I think everybody there, including the natives, realized that war was being declared and that history was being made by a hundred men who thought as American oilmen always have—that a hundred of them can lick the entire military establishment of any other country.

It's pretty cocky, maybe, but it's helped to drag oil out of the ground from Iraq to the Indies. And oil's what makes the modern world go round, so maybe there's something magnificent about it, too.

We all started celebrating our future independence then and there. For a little while the *jefe* just glowered at us, and then he started to shine up to us. General Alazar knew we had something on him, but just what or how much he did not know and wanted to find out.

I lent Jingle Bill some money, which was his right and which he accepted as such. From then on, every time I looked at him he was in deep discussion with some big company man.

I stuck with the Laird Kids, they being the most serious drinkers in the house. They were as inseparable as Siamese twins, as I've said. It was partly because they had more fun that way, and partly because Young Kid didn't dare leave his father to his own devices for more than the briefest periods. The fact was that Young Kid was getting old before his time trying to keep his daddy out of trouble. By the same token, as Young Kid aged Old Kid grew younger, which made them get closer all the time. The Union in Tampico—that's the red-light district—had a hundred and forty-four square blocks in it when I was conducting sociological researches thereabouts, and Young Kid had rescued his father from every block of it.

About an hour after we'd got started on our spree, General Alazar was talking to the Kid. It happened that at the same time Young Kid was talking to a dancehall girl and consequently did not have Old Kid under observation. So Old Kid proceeded to knock the general as cold as a well-digger's little toe.

There was a free-for-all to warm the cockles of a man's heart, and twenty of us got thrown into their fleabitten clink. The general came to, and then and there fined us four public comfort stations—to be built around the plaza with our own hands before release from custody. So instead of being on the train for the north next day, Hunk was with Monte and me in a work gang—pouring beautiful concrete privies round and about the plaza. My own mouth felt like the cave of a hyena which had been shedding its hair, and the rest felt worse. A hundred or so grinning roughnecks helped us out, and they had hangovers, too.

Through judicious bribery we had all the beer we wanted—which was plenty—so by mid-afternoon we were all pretty drunk again, as well as slightly resentful of our large audience of jeering Mexicans.

I think the general had got drunk the night before as an aid to his self-esteem, but he stayed drunk all the next day because he was proud of himself. He was, in fact, the drunkest man in town when he strutted around to make a final inspection late that afternoon.

The Lairds were working in my gang, and Alazar stopped and hissed something into the Kid's ear. The sneer on his face was enough to make a statue spit, but what the *jefe* said was straight dynamite.

Old Kid swung his right, and Young Kid's left traveled plumb forward. The left hit the point of Alazar's jaw. Kid senior's right connected with his ear, and for the second time in twenty-four hours the *jefe* bit the dust.

He was so drunk he never became conscious as they carried him to his official residence.

A hasty collection of a thousand pesos for the chief of police, who didn't like General Alazar anyhow, enabled us to rush to the *jefe's* residence and throw up an ornate concrete outhouse where only a ramshackle wooden one had been before. The general was still passed out in his own bed, and we were a little nervous for fear he'd wake up and take a couple of potshots at us out of the window. We agreed that when he awakened he would not be feeling very well, but hoped that while getting over his illness new and salubrious surroundings to be sick in would help. As a special

tribute we sent down to a little store that sold plaster statues and got one of "The Thinker" and stuck it in the cement above the door. Then the chief of police looked the other way and we left there, full of the satisfaction of artistic achievement, and beer.

As we meandered homeward, Young Kid Laird drew me to one side and gestured at Jingle Bill. The blond giant was riding in a coupe with the general manager of Indy Gas and Oil, and Bill was doing a lot of talking.

"Thought you ought to know he's been propositioning every big company man about that five hundred acres in the middle of your land," Young Kid said. "He's sure shoppin' for a deal, and all he wants is the entire earth."

"I don't blame any man for playing his hole card for all it's worth or more," I said. "I've done it myself and I'll do it again. After he's shopped around, we'll make a deal."

Nevertheless, as I thought of that torchlit scene in Huabrache, and the temper of the peons on our acreage, I did not feel too comfortable.

MY feelings didn't improve much either in the week that followed when Monte and I were worrying over whether Hunk would get the *dinero* we needed or not. As he'd told the boys in Farazan, we had choice acreage all over and no money. In fact, in this business the better I'm doing the more I'm gambling and the less I've got, until sometimes I figure that if I should ever fall heir to all the oil holdings on earth I'd be the biggest bankrupt ever heard of.

Hunk got the two million all right and shipped it down to us, and then ten crews and rigs arrived, with five more in transit. Hunk was due on the boat from New Orleans which would dock in an hour when there came a knock on the door of our office in Tampico. It was nine o'clock at night, so Monte and I were alone. Before anyone could say "come in," the door opened and in walked a handsome blond giant in a spotless white suit, Panama hat, and brown and white sport shoes, who might have stepped straight out of an illustration in a woman's magazine.

It was Jingle Bill.

He acted as though his sudden appearance, when no one had laid eyes on him for almost three weeks, was the most natural thing in the world. He took out a silver cigarette case and gave us each a cigarette as he said casually, "I understand Hunk Gardiner is due back tonight."

"That's right," I said. "We're about to take off to meet him at the dock—he's coming in on a Ward Line freighter."

"Then I'll wait to talk business until he arrives," Mr. Smith said calmly, looking as though he were smiling when he really wasn't.

"What kind of business?" Monte asked softly.

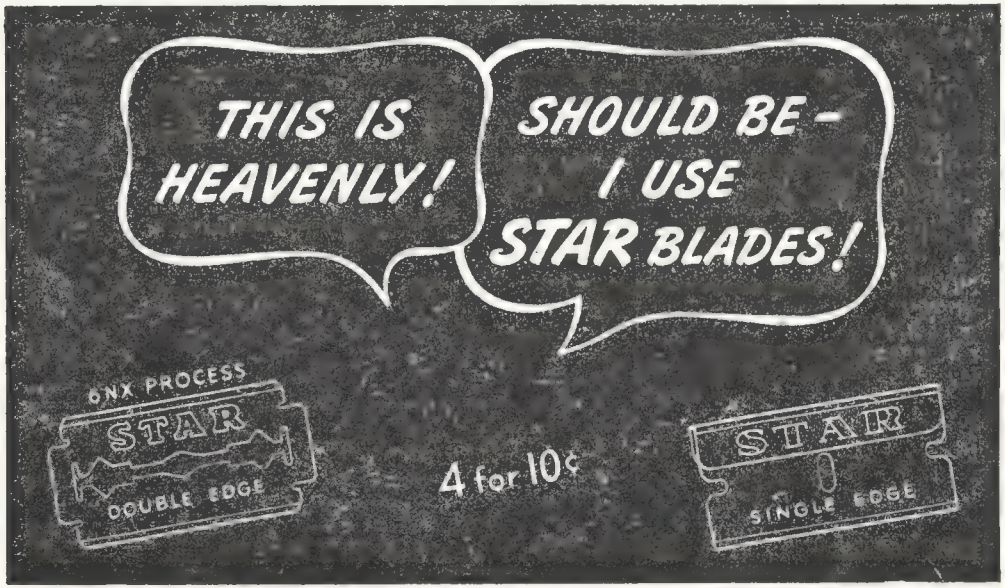
"Important business. I hear that you've given General Zelaya a quarter of a million dollars as Border Pete's contribution to the oil army. I hope you can get some of it back."

Somehow I found myself on my feet. Monte didn't move. His light gray eyes were almost white. He licked his lips and said, "Why?"

"Because you haven't got any acreage, really," Jingle Bill said casually. "Of course—"

"What the hell are you talking about?" I exploded.

"Better I talk to you all together," he told us. "I'll be celebrating a little at El Suiza. Why don't you all join me there after Gardiner



arrives? I leave for Huabrache around midnight. *Adiós.*"

Walking like a big cat, he went out and closed the door carefully behind him.

Monte and I looked at each other. Then he said slowly, "No use in talking until we know the lay."

And even if we'd wanted to talk, we couldn't have as we made our worried way through packed streets to the docks. I was in a daze, and I think Monte was, too.

There was really only one thing we knew about Jingle Bill. That was that he didn't fool. And if he was not bluffing, we were in a position such as I would not wish even on a competitor.

Every store, cantina and restaurant was wide open, and would be all night. The traffic was so thick that the traffic policemen on their pedestals, directing the flow with one hand and scratching their fleas with the other, looked as though they'd been squirted above the crowd by sheer pressure of numbers. On one side of the plaza a circle of men walked in one direction, a circle of girls and their duennas in another, in the immemorial courting routine of the Spaniard. On the next plaza, where all streetcar lines met, the car for the restricted district was just leaving with at least twenty men sitting on the roof.

The cars for the section had red lights burning on them night and day, so that the valuable time of visiting scientists would not be wasted. I do not remember who was president of the Chamber of Commerce at the time.

Tampico was a roaring boom city instead of a town, and the second largest port in the Americas at the time—so overcrowded that there wasn't a rickety hut set on stilts above the Panuco River which wasn't bursting its walls. And it was close to strangling in the flow of liquid gold that poured from the earth in quantities which made oldtimers wonder whether they were drunk even when they knew they were sober.

On any block you could see several men worth millions of dollars, and others representing hundreds of millions—Dutch, German, British, American, South American. There were 'dobe huts on the main street, and likewise the International Hotel. This hostelry was a massive structure quite worthy of a modern city, except that it had two hundred rooms and only two baths—usually out of order. Perched on telephone and telegraph wires in the heart of the city were thousands of buzzards, while on the streets, when the wind came off the sea, oilmen's wives wore ten-thousand-dollar fur coats.

It was a wild, stinking, voluptuous, hard-boiled, guitar-twanging Baghdad—the spirit and beating heart of the oil business of those days.

My heart lifted to it, as it always does when oil history is being made in the town where I am, but there was a chilly feeling around my heart that I could not shake off.

The mere sight of the big redhead getting off the boat warmed me up a little. When we told him about our date at El Suiza and the reason therefor, his complete contempt for any possibility of real trouble was like four fingers of good red bourbon.

Hunk Gardiner was a swashbuckler who always made good. Not only that, every time he lived up to his boasts he was pleased as a kid, as naively proud as though he had never done it before. Now, returning to Mexico with two million dollars, Tampico was his oyster and Jingle Bill only a shell to be removed by standard methods.

"So he'll try to hold out around Huabrache," he grinned. "So we'll deny him right of way into that property. Then he'll organize the peons and try to make trouble for us. Then we'll send in our private army and slap him down. By the way, how is the army doing?"

"Good," Monte said as we got into the rattletrap taxi. "General Zelaya has recruited a couple of thousand men, mostly from outlying provinces, and is whipping them into shape in a tent encampment ten miles out of town. Subordinates are drilling local detachments in various places."

"A little fast work out of New York," stated Hunk, "for some of which you can thank yours truly, will bring a lot of uniforms and other material from the World War down here in jig time. What kind of an hombre is Zelaya?"

"Known him for years," Monte said. "He's a sardonic devil, knows his stuff, and will graft like a gentleman. If he gets a better offer from the other side, he'll give us a chance to meet the bid. Through the Huasteca bunch we got Mexico City's unofficial blessing, but Zelaya's men can't wear official insignia as yet."

WE got out at El Suiza and plowed up the stairs. Hunk was feeling festive, and did a very creditable jig in the lobby to the tune of the band inside.

When we went into the crowded place, the first thing we saw, at a floor table directly across from us, was Jingle Bill. He was talking to a little man in a khaki uniform with the insignia of a Zelaya general on it.

In those days there were roughly three ranks in any Mexican army—private, sergeant and general.

Jingle Bill looked up at us and beckoned. The little general took a look as us, grinned, and strutted off.

When we made no move to join him, Jingle Bill took a paper out of his inside coat pocket. He tapped it, and beckoned again. A lot of oil men in the place who knew the score on our acreage were watching.

"There isn't another table in the house," I

said to Hunk. "This is no time to stand on our dignity."

He grunted, and we made our way toward Mr. Smith.

I think half the people in the place were thinking the same thing I was. Hunk and Jingle Bill were so alike, and yet such contrasts that the effect of the two enemies getting close to one another was uncanny.

Gardiner was in an ensemble of brown and red, from shoes through tweeds to his fiery hair, and Jingle Bill was all white and yellow. Of a size, both alert and yet poised, they were like two bulls, one red and one white, advancing warily for combat.

El Suiza was a barren-looking place with undecorated walls, furnished with ordinary kitchen chairs and tables, the latter covered with red tablecloths. It was always packed, because in addition to the dance floor and come-what-may band it had a so-called revue featuring twenty girls of assorted shapes and sizes but one common attraction: they were all from the States. I've seen five hundred silver dollars roll across the floor from the customers toward a blonde who couldn't sing but had a pretty face, and a thousand for a brunette who couldn't dance but had pretty legs.

None of the girls there of my acquaintance, nor those in the Louisian—a similar place—would have had much chance of winning the election for president of the Christian Endeaver in my hometown. Nevertheless, the most straight-laced of oil wives accompanied their husbands to El Suiza or the Louisian because there was nowhere else to go. Consequently both places were particular, for those parts and times. A roughneck was welcome to dance in his working clothes, for instance, but he was frowned upon if he spit anywhere except in the goboons provided for that purpose.

Jingle Bill arose to greet us with considerable aplomb. With the whole place watching, including the dancers, he waved us to seats. Just then the band quit playing, and fifty silver dollars clinked into the kitty-horn in front of the bandstand. In the silence that followed, Bill said, "I'm sorry that unexpected business will keep me from staying long enough to buy you a drink."

No one offered to shake hands, but we all sat down. Ceremoniously, Jingle Bill opened the paper he had in his hand.

"I can wait long enough for you to read this," he said.

Just then the band struck up again, and the chorus girls pranced out on the floor. I wouldn't have thought that any piece of reading matter could have kept my eyes from twenty American chorus girls in those days, but this one did. Three heads bent over the table, while Jingle Bill's remained high, watching the girls.

Across the top of the typewritten sheet were the words: *Signed copies in the possession of Pedro Sarolla and William Smith.*

The body of it read—

> I hereby cancel the lease (and option preceding it) on my holdings in the Huabrache district, executed to the Border Petroleum Company through its representatives: Hallowell Adams Gardiner, III, Montgomery Mathews and Daniel Somers. I hereby revoke all agreements because (1) of deception by the Border Petroleum Company in that its representatives and owners represented to me that they had ample funds to fully develop the acreage, which they have since publicly admitted they did not have; and (2) the agreements were obtained by coercion, including threats against my life and property if I did not sign the agreements hereby being voided. I have this day signed similar agreements with William Smith and Pedro Sarolla, which supersede those with the Border Petroleum Company, hereby canceled.
>
> Alvarado de Rizzaro

For a moment no one could say anything. Then Hunk had the first cousin to an epileptic fit, including frothing at the mouth.

"Even if this is on the level we can win in the long run!" he yowled above the tapping of the chorus girls. "But, by God, this means that the acreage will be in litigation for years to come—every drop of oil in escrow!"

Then, very abruptly, he became calm as Jingle Bill leaned forward.

"It looks as though you had got that money in Boston under false pretenses," he said, showing those big wolf-teeth.

Monte wet his lips. None of us were harmless at that moment, being nearly three hundred thousand dollars in the hole for money we had innocently procured under possible false pretences. But Hunk and I were silly, baaing lambs alongside that white-eyed killer sitting so quietly beside us.

"I'm calling Don Alvarado right now," Hunk said. "And if—"

"I'm sorry," Jingle Bill said serenely. "I tried to call him myself and it seems that his telephone line is out of order."

"I see," Hunk said slowly.

"I think it will be to your advantage to come to Huabrache tomorrow and satisfy yourself that you have no legal title to your acreage." Jingle Bill smiled, his eyes expressionless.

The chorus girls galloped off the floor as Monte got to his feet.

"I had sympathy with you and the Huabrache men, up to now, because we have all played lonely and desperate hands in our time," he said, every drop of color drained from his eyes. Jingle Bill got up, and suddenly we were all on our feet as Monte went on, "But this, Mr. Smith, looks like dirty pool."

"At which game," Jingle Bill smiled, "I do not doubt that you are all experts."

"The day will come when those words may be shot down your throat," Monte said carefully. "This is not a matter for armies or courts. We will be in Huabrache tomorrow morning, Mr. Smith, prepared to fight fire with hotter fire. And if there be any firing, so to speak, the first shot will be at you and it will not miss."

Jingle Bill bowed. The conversation was so quiet that we might have been making a date for lunch next day.

"I think you will find," Bill said, "that melodrama will not fit the case. *Adiós*, gentlemen—keep that copy."

And as the girls came back for an encore, he made his way out of the place, jingling the coins in his pocket.

I gave Monte a shove as we sat down. "Remember that a year from now it won't mean a thing," I said. "Back to back we can lick the world, so don't anybody get dramatic. Instead, let's get a little drunk."

CHAPTER IV

BUZZARDS ABOVE—AND BELOW

AT ten the next morning we rode into Huabrache on our way to Don Alvarado's hacienda. With us were a dozen lads we'd shipped down from the States. They'd been around, too.

At the edge of the improvised plaza of that impromptu village, we stopped our horses and our eyes popped.

A hundred men in khaki uniforms were drilling in columns of fours. A giant on horseback was shouting orders to them, and that man was Jingle Bill.

He was dressed in riding breeches and a shirt of yellowish cloth—and garnished with shiny leather boots and a much begilded military cap.

When he saw us he halted the marching men. In a professionally military manner he turned them over to a subordinate—and that subordinate was the young Mexican whose little finger I had inadvertently cut off.

As Juan Berela ordered the men to fall out, Jingle Bill rode toward us. He was really a sight to see in that yellow uniform, astride a big black stallion.

Monte squinted at the insignia on his shoulders and cap and uttered the first words spoken by any one of the three of us.

"Jingle Bill," he said thoughtfully, "also seems to be a colonel in General Zelaya's personal army!"

"I recruited these men, and will soon have many more," Jingle Bill explained with that look on his face that made it seem he was smiling when he really wasn't. "So General Zalaya made me a colonel."

"A hundred men from the middle of our acreage," Hunk said sardonically, "who hate our guts, are being paid by us to protect us, and are trying to steal our land! Bill, my good man, I have seen some remarkable chiselers in my time, but I'm inclined to believe you're unique, not to say extraordinary!"

"I fought with the Australians in the war, and became a major," Bill said. "General Zelaya considers me a valuable man."

"I suppose you won the Victoria Cross, too?" Hunk sneered.

"No, only a D.S.C. and the Croix de Guerre," Jingle Bill said casually.

"The funny part of it is," Hunk said gruffly, "I believe you."

Jingle Bill accepted the compliment with equanimity while Hunk produced the paper that had been left with us the night before. On the other side of the clearing the new soldiers were relaxing in the shade, except for a few who were patronizing the cantina. They were all looking at us. More than that, they were laughing at us.

Hunk waved the paper in Jingle Bill's face. "What is this—a fake?" he snapped.

Without the slightest change in the faraway look Bill always had in his Oriental eyes, he moved one of his two guns a trifle, brought a new leather wallet from his pants pocket, and produced an original and a carbon copy.

Both were signed with the familiar signature of Don Alvarado, but they had not been notarized.

I felt that both Monte and Hunk were aware of that detail, but naturally no one said anything. Jingle Bill allowed us to look them over as he held them up, and then said, "Pedro has another copy. I was not bluffing."

"What did you do—hold a gun to Don Alvarado's head to make him sign?" Monte asked evenly.

"Not at all. Don Alvarado is a sensible man. The day is past when big landholders can maintain the feudal system. These Huabrache men know what it is to have their own land. They don't kneel down and worship Don Alvarado, as the old man's servants do. So when we all rode up to the hacienda, and declared war if we were not allowed to have a say in what happens to the land surrounding ours, Don Alvarado saw the point."

"Exactly what point?" Hunk asked.

"The point that if you were drilling on Don Alvarado's land without making a proper deal with us, you and your wells and Don Alvarado might have trouble, and profits might be—difficult to make."

We digested this for a moment. I could see the old don's position. And our own. Aside from the farce of having these men members of the oil companies' private police force, as private citizens they could make future operations on the hacienda so hazardous that any landowner anxious for quick profits would think twice before defying them.

I could almost see Hunk's brain revolving.

Never did I know a man who hated to be licked as much as Hunk did—unless it is myself. I could feel his mind working over the possibilities, including use of Zelaya's army against the embattled peons of Huabrache. But no one on earth could force the Huabrache landholders to lease to us, and no man on earth could predict to what lengths they would go under the leadership of Jingle Bill.

Every word was dragged out of Hallowell Adams Gardiner, III, as he forced himself to say, "What do you call a proper deal, Mr. Blackmailer?"

The answer hit me right between the eyes. "The time for a proper deal has passed," Smith said.

"What do you mean, it's passed?" Hunk roared. "You can't win in court; you can't make money any more than we can while the case is fought in court; we've got the rigs and the men and the know-how and you've got nothing—"

"We have everything, Gardiner, including financing. If you don't think so, ask General Alazar."

He waved at the cantina. For the first time I noticed the fat little *jefe* of Farazan leaning against the bar.

"Alazar!" Hunk exploded. "He's in with you?"

"To the extent of supplying the tools and the men."

Once again he had us back on our heels. If a highly-placed Federal officer clamped down on some rigs being shipped in, no one could do anything about it, even if he delayed payment somewhat, or forever.

"And of course," Jingle Bill went on, "we can get capital on the acreage—"

"The hell you can. If this acreage isn't ours it sure as hell isn't yours, and it won't be anybody's for ten years! You can't drill, or sell the oil if you do drill, or touch the money if you do sell the oil! Why, damn your slant-eyed soul—"

"Of course," Jingle Bill interrupted casually, "I expect that as a businessman you'll see the situation, and accept a small portion of our profits in return for giving up your alleged claims on the Rizzaro fifteen hundred acres."

Hunk's mouth worked, but for a moment he couldn't get the words out. His face was a bright pink, his eyes blazing like heat-lightning. Jingle Bill's eyes had not changed. He was appraising the situation as though it were a very minor detail—a second in infinity—and looking at us as though we were toy soldiers he was interested in moving into new formations.

One astounding fact, though, could not be escaped. I had to salute this brand new colonel who had stepped out of the monte less than two weeks before without a pair of socks to his feet.

Instead of Border Petroleum throwing him and his few raggedy peons a one-eighth royalty bone for their five hundred acres, this adventurer was half contemptuously offering *us* a crumb from *his* table for our fifteen hundred acres.

Monte spoke in that absent monotone.

"We will see Don Alvarado. It is strange that his telephone line was cut." Softly he added, "I think there are things about this that I should like to know."

"I'll go with you," Jingle Bill said. "I saw him only two hours ago, and he was feeling fine. Pedro's with him now, talking over some details—"

"The hell he is. Here he comes now," Hunk snarled.

Sarolla came cantering across the clearing. His gaze swept over our faces, and those of the roughnecks behind us. I noticed that his eyes were very wide and bright, with a curious blank look in them. He seemed highly excited. His overalls and sandals looked as though they were just drying out from a soaking.

"What are these men doing on our land?" He laughed with almost hysterical triumph.

"We are on our way to see Don Alvarado," Jingle Bill explained. He gripped Pedro's frail arm affectionately. "I trust you found him well and happy?"

"He was out riding. If you go over there, I'll go too, eh?"

"Of course. Shall we depart, gentlemen? The quicker you satisfy yourselves of Don Alvarado's sincerity, the sooner we can buy you off and get rid of you. I'll get the general."

HE not only got General Alazar. He got twenty-five soldiers who went behind the cantina, mounted horses and fell in behind us. I had a very funny feeling with my back to General Alazar's baleful gaze, Pedro Sarolla's unpredictable temperament, and young Juan's machete-conscious hatred for Yanquis in general, us in particular—and the man who had cut off part of his finger especially.

"If Bill's telling the truth, we're licked," Monte said absently. "Want to know something?"

"I personally would like to know *anything*," snapped Hunk.

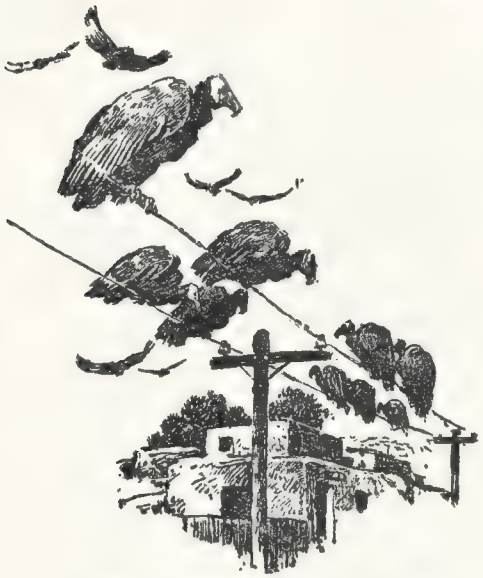
"If Jingle Bill has beat us on the level, damned if I haven't got a sneaking feeling that I'm glad he *did* beat us bigshots!"

"Me, too, Monte," I said. "It's sort of like the old days in Oklahoma when you and I with no money were fighting Hunk with all the money in the world!"

The big fellow glared at us.

"Are you crazy? Three hundred thousand dollars of borrowed money in the hole. Every rig we own down here in this fleabitten, fly-specked, buzzard-benighted country, dealing with a man who wants the earth—"

"He may be a little on the hoggish side, at that," I acknowledged. "I think I'll drop back



"Look at those buzzards," said Monte softly. "Something on this place has just died, or is dying."

and see what I can do with him. After all, Bill saved my life and a man always feels good toward somebody he's done something for. If he doesn't remember that I lent him money in Farazan, maybe I can get somewhere."

So I dropped back until I was abreast of Jingle Bill, Sarolla and General Alazar. Just behind us Juan's mean little eyes stared at me and he smiled faintly. He—and others—had the benevolent look of a cat with a crippled mouse under its paw considering whether to play with mousie a while longer or eat it now.

"I trust that you and your family are enjoying your new privy?" I said politely to Alazar.

For a moment his bulging black eyes tried to stare me down. He pulled at his black moustache, and I could feel him start to boil.

Then, suddenly, he threw back his head and started to laugh. In fact, he laughed very heartily, and I didn't like it. It wasn't natural.

General Alazar had ordered the blowing up of three wells so that he could become the grafting head of an oil-paid army. This juicy plum had been snatched from him, and he had been knocked kicking not once, but twice. His stature with the rich oil companies, and in his own bailiwick, was that of a peglegged beetle.

If a *jefe* could laugh loud and long under those circumstances, it could be for only one reason: he felt that all the money and revenge he craved were now in his power to obtain.

So I was feeling a little unwell as I beckoned Jingle Bill to the side of the column, and said in low tones, "If your deal with Don Alvarado is on the level, we know when we're licked. We respect a good fair fighter and will offer you a good fair deal. But if there's been unclean activity at the fork in the road, there's going to be a lot of trouble. Just assuming that you've put one over on us with Don Alvarado, fair and square, why try to hog everything?"

"You were the hogs," Bill reminded me, "when you threatened to refuse us a right of way into our own land if we didn't accept your first proposition."

"Court action for ten years won't do anybody any good," I said.

General Alazar overheard me. His greasy round face split in a saturnine grimace.

'Now that I have been honored with the leadership of this situation," he said, "Mexican citizens will win in the court—pronto."

"And there will be no compromise," Jingle Bill said evenly.

Pedro Sarolla, his gaunt face even more taut than usual, cried excitedly, "Never! Never!"

"A man can lose everything, trying to get it all," I told them. "When you came back to Huabrache, Bill, you didn't seem to have done too well in Africa—or anywhere else. Could it be because you're never satisfied with enough?"

"It not only could be—it is," he admitted with that Olympian calm. "And the time has come when a man like myself must make his pile, take his proper position in life, and be shrewd and tough and very, very smart. That is me—now. I want no more than I know I can get, for myself and for these other men."

A whistle shrilled over the monte. The front of the column had rounded a turn in the trail to come within sight of the huge Rizzaro hacienda.

Two guards at the gate were riding burros toward the house. From outbuildings, surrounding fields, the woods and from the hacienda itself poured twenty or more men. All were Indian retainers and sharecroppers of Don Alvarado, and all were armed.

Some had only machetes and clubs, but most had rifles and pistols. They were an army prepared to repel invasion.

I looked at the three noncommittal faces beside me, and said slowly, "It looks to me as though there'd already been a battle here. Could it have had anything to do with those papers in your pockets?"

"Maybe there was—and maybe there will be more!" cackled Pedro.

Now the excitement which had been gripping him since we'd first seen him had increased. He appeared to be spoiling for a fight.

Jingle Bill was patting Pedro's shoulder, as though to calm him down, when I urged my horse to the head of the line. I got there just as Don Alvarado's foreman, a squat Indian, walked forward to meet us. His men were ranged now behind the protection of the thick 'dobe rail around the veranda.

"You are with these—these soldiers?" spat the foreman.

"No," Hunk said. "We wish to see Don Alvarado—"

"You I will allow in, with Señor Somers and Señor Mathews," the flat-faced Indian said tonelessly. "You others—yes, you too, Jingle Bill—come beyond this fence and you will not live to go back where you come from!"

He had guts, that old foreman. His men were covering him alertly from behind their impromptu battlement.

"Don Alvarado and Manuel, his servant, are making a last-minute inspection of the estate before he leaves for Mexico City," the foreman told Hunk. "They should have been back an hour ago. Strange things have been taking place—"

"Look at those buzzards," Monte interrupted softly, his head thrown back a little. "Something on this place has just died, or is dying."

The eyes of the group around the foreman followed Monte's pointing finger. That caused Jingle Bill's army to gaze upward and some of Don Alvarado's embattled household to come out of concealment and squint at the sky.

From all quarters and heights the great birds were dropping toward the edge of a field less than a mile away.

"There are no animals of ours in that direction," the Yaqui foreman said. "So many birds—"

Then he stopped, and I know that the same thought popped into many of our heads at the same time. The foreman turned, yelling something to the men on the porch, and we all started riding hell-for-leather for that spot where the buzzards were dropping out of sight behind clumps of trees which dotted the fields.

MONTE and I had the best horses and got there first. I was not surprised at what we found, but the exact details made me gasp and turn away. As I helped Monte drive away the scavengers, I felt a little sick, and very, very mad.

The twenty retainers of Don Alvarado said not a word. Jingle Bill's group of soldiers looked horror-stricken, and then frightened. Pedro Sarolla stared into the opening in the monte with that same fascinated glare I had first noticed when the sight of blood spurting from Juan's finger had seemed to hypnotize him.

Lying on their backs in the center of the wide trail which wound through the forest were Don Alvarado and a tall, thin old Indian. In the heart of the Indian was a knife. And both bodies had been so viciously slashed with a machete that only a madman could have done it.

With a silent menace such as I have never since sensed in a group of human beings, the stoical Yaqui retainers of the hacienda withdrew several paces. Then, in a rough circle, they grunted the gutturals of their language. Occasionally one would point to the uneasy bunch of soldiers. The Huabrache men were alert, and very ill-at-ease. As one man they looked to Jingle Bill, and Jingle Bill looked down at those carved-up corpses.

There was not one trace of expression in his eyes or on that unlined, ageless face.

"Whoever did it," I said slowly, forgetting for the moment I wasn't still my daddy's deputy in Texas, "killed the Indian by throwing the knife. Then he slashed up the old don, and went to work on the dead body of Manuel."

I stared at Jingle Bill. So did Monte and so did Hunk, whose face was as white as this tablecloth. I was thinking back to the night Jingle Bill had saved my life by means of a knife thrown with the speed, accuracy and effect of a bullet.

Now the Indians had turned to face the Huabrache men. Their foreman stood a pace in advance. Their machetes were in their hands, their rifles cocked. Slowly the amateur soldiers started backing away. Their weapons, too, were ready.

There, I remember thinking, was a tiny sample of oil-bearing Mexico. There were feudal retainers, scions of men who had worked for the Spaniards since the days of Cortez, against the new and more independent peon; Indian against Mexican; foreigners against them both; and the battle lines drawn on land which held the oil that had crystalized age-old tensions. From General Alazar, greedy politician, to Colonel Smith, adventurer; from Hunk and Monte and me, independent oil men with big companies at our backs, to the dead aristocrat below us, almost all the conflicts in Mexico were represented here.

And why the opposing forces did not leap at each others' throats that moment I will never be able to explain. I did know that I felt that in a few minutes twenty men might lie dead on that field, including myself. So I found myself shouting, "Don't anybody make the first move! Maybe we can find out exactly who did this—"

"I don't know who, but I do know why!"

It was a gargantuan roar from Hunk Gardiner. A well of thoughts and words blew in like a gusher, and with almost as much noise. He paced up and down, waving his arms, as he bellowed.

"Somebody from Huabrache found out that Don Alvarado was going to Mexico City. They knew that the moment he got out of their physical power he could disavow the agreement he signed with Smith and Sarolla—a paper he was forced to sign with God knows how many guns pointed at him, and God alone knows what other threats against him!"

"That is correct, *señor*," the foreman said with slow venom. "Yesterday they rode up here—almost a hundred of them. Some went inside. The telephone wire we found cut. When they left, Don Alvarado was white with rage,

and we were ordered to protect this hacienda until we all left for his other holdings. This I say to these—these *soldiers!*"

He spat that last word, and he spat on the ground after he'd said it. His next words were like the slow drip of venom from the hollow fangs of a snake.

"Find the men who killed our master, or the men of Don Alvarado will gather from far and near and we will burn every stinking hut in Huabrache, and throw into the flames the bodies of as many of them as we can kill!"

Juan shouted a stream of obscenity. Monte Mathews had his guns in his hands as though he had plucked them out of the air. His eyes were like panes of glass, and his voice was almost a whisper as he threatened, "You say one more word and I will shoot your heart out!"

Juan licked his lips, looked about him for help, and found none. He turned and swaggered a few paces to the main group of soldiers. I think that at that moment he would gladly have given up his own life to have Monte, Hunk and myself helpless in his hands for just ten minutes.

Pedro was still staring vacantly at the bodies. Jingle Bill, a little aloof, had one leg crooked over the back of his horse and slowly rolled a cigarette. He eyed the work of his fingers as though it were a vastly new and interesting operation.

"Keep everybody back," I told our roughnecks. "Come on, Monte."

We dismounted and circled around the two dead men.

I never could read evidence like my daddy could, but I could see that a horse which had come out of the bushes had a nick in his off front shoe. That same horse had galloped back up the trail driving the mounts of Don Alvarado and Manuel before him. The horse with the nicked shoe had almost certainly been ridden by the murderer.

"We might be able to trail him," Monte said, "but in Huabrache—"

I interrupted him.

"I don't think it will be necessary."

We walked out into the open. A few feet away the buzzards were waiting with raucous impatience.

"Have the bodies covered, please," I said to the foreman. "Did Jingle Bill or Pedro Sarolla see your master today?"

"The big man saw him just as he was going off for his ride," the Yaqui said sullenly. "The other one I did not see."

Then Monte and I looked at each other. We had both noticed the same thing at the same time.

Pedro Sarolla's horse had a tiny nick in its off front shoe.

"Jingle Bill first," I said to Monte. "That knife was thrown."

THE two murderous little armies waited as though they were painted figures in that sun-drenched atmosphere, abuzz with the thousand insects of the jungle.

I swung up on my horse, and rode up to Colonel Smith.

"Ride this same horse this morning?" I asked him, just for the record.

"No," he said casually. "Mine was being reshod, so I rode Pedro's."

Then I saw it all. The old Spanish nobleman, unconsciously perhaps, had revealed his intention to go to Mexico City and revoke the agreement obtained under coercion. Jingle Bill, relying on the protection of Alazar, and his own rank, had circled through the monte and intercepted the two men.

And I realized another thing. No holds were barred in this battle—and if there was any law, it was as far away as it had been in the Indian Territory in 1907. I was mad and, I'm not ashamed to admit, scared.

A plan jumped into my hot mind. With as much of a poker face as I could manage, I said to Jingle Bill, "You saved my life once. Maybe I can return the favor. Come over here!"

Without question or sign of emotion he followed me to a point fifteen feet from the lowering Yaquis.

I placed myself so that Colonel William Smith was between me and his soldiers. The hacienda army was at my back. Then I drew both guns, and shoved them in Jingle Bill's guts. He did not even move for his own.

"Now, you murdering swine, take out that pocketbook and tear up those papers!" I snarled.

"You will have a very hard job proving I killed them," he said quietly.

Those slant eyes never wavered, nor did their expression change. Suddenly I knew that I had never in my life seen a man as tough as this, and probably never would again. He had been born, it appeared, without the capacity for fear or worry or a sense of guilt.

"If I could prove it, what good would it do? With the most important Federal man in this district on your side, the law would be a joke," I told him. "Get those papers out, damn you, and tear them up or, so help me, I'll shoot. Then our men and these Yaquis will fight it out with your tinhorn army and your bought-and-paid-for *jefe!*"

Without haste he reached for the pocketbook, drew out the papers, and tore them into little pieces. Not until then did most of our audience realize what was happening.

Hunk Gardiner's triumphant shout rang over the sunbaked fields and the whispering monte.

"Attaboy, Dan! And Pedro must have the other copies with him—"

Alazar exploded in a string of Spanish curses. He rode forward and yelled frantically, "What goes on here?"

Not until then, apparently, did Pedro Sarolla comprehend what had happened, and what was about to happen, to the signed copies of the agreement for which Don Alvarado had been murdered.

Giving vent to a wild sort of scream, he wheeled his horse and streaked across the field at a dead gallop.

"That's the tipoff—"

"He's got the rest of the papers!" yelled Hunk. "After him, boys!"

Twice he shouted orders for Pedro to stop. Then Monte and I fired together. Sarolla shot off his horse. The animal dragged him for a few feet, and then the doomed Mexican's heel came loose from the stirrup.

I yelled to our roughnecks to protect us as Monte and I raced for the body. The Huabrache men seemed thoroughly cowed. Jingle Bill had made no move, and without him and Pedro they were nothing. The gigantic soldier of fortune sat his horse like a statute in black and yellow marble.

Both Monte and I had missed Pedro's heart, so he wasn't dead. He was coughing out his life in torrents of blood, but he managed to gasp, "Jingle Bill did not kill them. I did—get him here."

"First we'll get that paper," Monte stated flatly, and we did.

By the time the final blood-soaked copy of the troublesome agreement had been torn up, the three groups of men were gathered in a loose circle around us. Sarolla's hollow, haunted eyes were peaceful now, and perhaps he was glad that the conflicts within him, and outside of him, were over. His eyes rested continuously on Jingle Bill as the blond giant squatted beside him and took the young Mexican's head in his arms.

"I overheard men saying that the don was leaving," Pedro gasped. "I thought I would meet him and kidnap him and that General Alazar and you could—persuade him to stick with us. Or—or force him to. But when I forded the creek my—gun got clogged with mud and I did not know it. Manuel realized it before I did. He would have killed me. I threw the knife as you taught me in Africa, and then beat off Don Alvarado with Manuel's machete.

"Then I—something happened. I think I—was—was crazy—"

In a last paroxysm, his blood-strangled breathing stopped.

Jingle Bill put the Mexican's head down on the ground, and covered the bloodied face with a khaki handkerchief. His slanted gray eyes seemed to be looking far beyond the hacienda, and his face was as cold and blank as a stone.

"Why did you try to protect Pedro?" I asked him quietly.

"I felt responsible for him." Jingle Bill shrugged. No other man moved or spoke. "In Africa, deep in the bush after gold, we were captives—forced to watch native tortures, knowing that we would be next. We were rescued, but it did something to Pedro, all that blood. Starvation and thirst and fever and memories ruined him—"

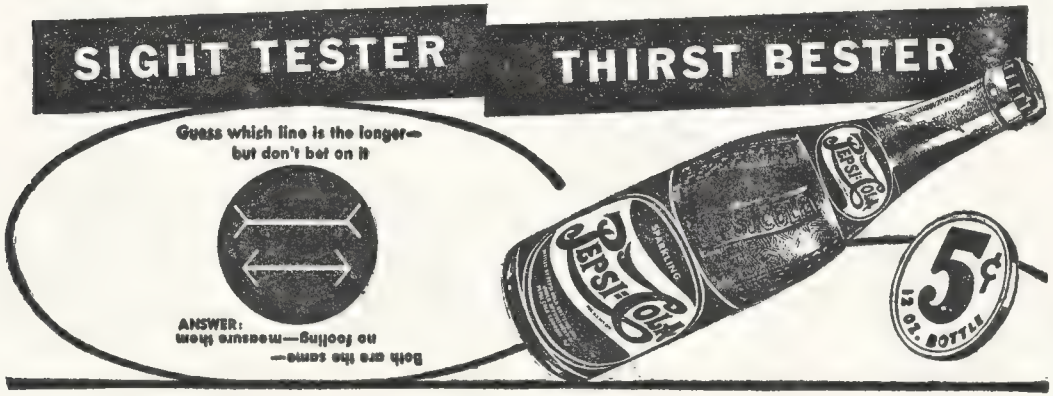
Again silence fell as his voice trailed off. Finally, as though to himself, he uttered his requiem for Pedro Sarolla.

"He wished to see the world, to make money, to learn to paint—and he had the money to take us to Africa."

"O.K., that's that!" Hunk Gardiner said incisively. "Now every man here listen to me. Your dirty play failed. This acreage is leased to us. I am in a position to state, Mr. Jingle Bill Smith and the rest of you Huabrache men, that no big company in this field will deal for your five hundred acres. There was a time when we'd have made a concession or two. Not now. Do you want to take your customary and legal eighth royalty? If so, who signs the lease for Sarolla, and how many other men own their land?"

Jingle Bill leaned against his black horse. His eyes swept over his twenty-five soldiers. Then he spoke slowly.

"The sister of Pedro, who was raped by the Butcher Bird before I killed him, will take my



advice. She will have authority from the small landholders. You have won. But you and the other companies owe us much, Mr. Gardiner."

He turned to the chunk of pure poison who was the *jefe* of Farazen.

"Do not worry, General Alazar. We will get what is owed us in another way."

CHAPTER V

$3,800,000 IN GOLD

TWO days later Jingle Bill and the Huabrache gang, still in khaki, held up the toolpusher carrying the payroll of eighty-six thousand dollars in silver and gold. Less than twenty-four hours afterward, Standard was hijacked of a little over sixty thousand. Two days after that, Bill's enlarged little army burst into the Huasteca Ranch and lifted more than a hundred thousand pesos from the safe.

The field was in a turmoil, and in every cantina from Zacamystl to the Texas border exultant peons were toasting Jingle Bill's health, and cursing oilmen were plotting his doom. His intelligence system included practically every Mexican in the territory, and during those few day his wild fiestas in remote settlements, and his princely gifts, made the legends of Robin Hood seem like the activities of boys at play.

Rebellion was rampant through the fields. Tampico was agog. The oil-subsidized army of General Zelaya, still poorly equipped, was readying to move south against the hard-riding desperadoes, when Jingle Bill committed his masterpiece. He and his men slipped into Tampico itself in the middle of the night and engineered the first bank robbery in the history of the city. They got a hundred and five thousand dollars, and left a note: *Charge to the account of Border Petroleum.*

It was at midnight the next night, with every top oil executive in the field gathered in the Colonial Club to discuss with General Zelaya last-minute details of the campaign to abolish Jingle Bill, when Kid and Young Kid Laird stormed in.

"Half the telephone lines in the field are cut!" the Kid announced. "There's a bigtime, honest-to-God revolutionary army of three thousand under General Carola himself working north from Cora Banca. General Alazar and the whole Farazan garrison have joined the revolution; joined Carola and are coming north and going crazy—looting or destroying everything they can get their hands on! Jingle Bill is with 'em."

"Why the hell should a man who's lifted a quarter of a million dollars in cash join the revolution?" bawled Hunk Gardiner above the pandemonium.

"Hell," snarled Kid Laird, "he's a full general, and chief of staff of the whole damn works!"

All of a sudden the angry outburst of the oil men petered out as they digested the Kid's words. Then Hunk Gardiner, speaking for us all, said soberly, "I wouldn't be surprised if tomorrow the lousy son was President!"

Five crowded days later Messrs. Hallowell Adams Gardiner, III, Montgomery Mathews and Daniel Somers, alleged bigshots of the oil business, were rolling along the section of the railroad between Santa Maria and Farazan Junction in a motor-driven handcar, bound for Tampico. It was a very remarkable handcar indeed, and behind us was an equally unique train for which we were acting as pilot car.

Our little equipage had four sidewalls made of sheet steel, reinforced with sandbags. Prepared openings allowed us to look out, and shoot, without showing ourselves. To the outside observer, the handcar had no occupants. Within these walls was ammunition enough to fight a small battle even in this war. In addition to a brace of pistols apiece, there were six rifles and three old Lewis machine guns. We had taken lessons on these last pieces.

Crawling along at twenty-five miles an hour a thousand yards behind us came a special four-car train. One baggage car held records and other valuable papers from branch offices of all the big companies in the southern part of the field, and likewise a dozen steel rails and a couple of dozen standard railroad ties, with tools for impromptu repair work on the railroad. In the next two passenger coaches were a variety of oilmen, including some of the most important in the field. There were a few American women and children and the families of various Mexicans who worked for the oil companies and were consequently considered as collaborationists by their revolutionary countrymen.

The last car was a mail car holding exactly three million, eight hundred thousand dollars in cash—the entire reserves of all the branch banks, businessmen, and oil companies in the south sixty miles of the field. A quarter of a million of it belonged to Border Pete, which accounted for at least some of our devotion to duty then and later.

All through the southern fields, the ever growing revolutionary army was moving like a slow, irresistible flood, but a flood divided into many channels. The hand of Jingle Bill, war officer, was visible in the manner in which coordinated detachments were fanning out all through the territory. Ordinarily there would have been just one large body of men moving north as a unit, their progress clogged with wives, camp-followers, and in many cases, whole families. Instead, this was a group of groups, riding hard and fast, living off the country, and popping up where least expected.

Often, in fact, behind where our own lines were supposed to be.

So the oil companies were evacuating some territory while General Zelaya's army moved south to meet the revolutionary army head-on. A Federal army was crawling up from Mexico City. It had taken days—and miracles—to get our troops even partly supplied and equipped. At the moment of which I speak, our train was coming close to territory which should, by now, be under Zelaya's control. Farazan, where he had set up headquarters, was twenty miles to the northeast, on a branch railroad line.

HUNK and I were standing at the front of the car. His eyes never left the rails ahead, searching for signs of explosives. My own eyes swept the terrain on each side of the track, both near and far. We were rolling through comparatively open country now, with occasional clumps of trees and undergrowth.

Here and there were wells which had been capped, or holes where drilling had been suspended. All oil camps were deserted. The monte, a mile to our left was solid jungle, angling gradually toward the track ahead.

Monte Mathews was attending to the little motor which *put-putted* us along, and very often his eyes anxiously scanned the skies to the south.

Suddenly he shouted, "It's a plane, by God! Maybe they made it!"

Hunk and I looked backward, and sure enough a growing speck in the sky was following the railroad track north. Our army had exactly three old Jennies—those ninety horsepower ships cadets trained on, in the last war—and the revolutionists had countered with as many Curtiss H's, flown by German combat pilots who had been bought off their jobs of instructing the small Mexican Air Service. The H's were Jennies with a more powerful motor in them. Some day the short air war in the Tampico fields should be told for the instruction and amusement of present-day pilots.

For instance, each plane had a radio set in it which could send messages tapped out in Morse code. They went out through an antenna wire fifty feet long which trailed out behind the plane in flight, held level by a window sashweight on the end. But every time a bump hit the plane or it banked too abruptly, the wire snapped. So radio communication had ceased long before the planes cracked up.

As the ship overhauled us, we were all silent. Then Monte said quietly, "Can't tell yet whether it's one of ours."

"Well, watch and pray!" Gardiner exploded. "I've never done anything harder than keep my eyes on this damned railroad track!"

"Me, too," I said, although to tell the truth I was stealing occasional looks at that speck in the sky.

"If it's ours, and has Maxy aboard, it can mean the winning of this whole damned teapot war!" Hunk said unnecessarily.

His mouth was so tight his cheek muscles bulged.

"If it's one of theirs," I said, equally without reason, "the first thing he'll machine-gun will probably be us."

"It's starting to dive," Monte said from behind us. "I trust it cometh as an angel from heaven."

That kind of language meant that Monte was worried. A few seconds later he gave what was a loud shout for him and a whisper for Hunk Gardiner.

"It's Cappy Kennard giving the wigwag, and I do believe he's got a passenger!"

"Wahoo!" yelled Hunk.

I exhaled breath I had been holding for a long time. "Slow her down until we see where he's going to land," I suggested to Monte.

The spot proved to be a field of stubble corn right alongside the railroad track a mile ahead. The Curtiss discharged its passenger, and took off without delay. It circled around and headed south again to keep its eye on the enemy.

Monte stopped our version of an armored car, and Mr. Maximillian Juarez O'Grady received a hearty welcome as he climbed aboard. Maxy was half Spanish and half black Irish, had blacker hair and darker skin than the average Mexican and was fluent in every dialect in that part of the country. His American speech leaned toward slang.

In private life he had worked up from apprentice roughneck to one of our crack drillers. In public life, meaning the past three days, he had been chief and entire staff of our military intelligence system. Ten minutes after he had arrived in Tampico, we'd sent him to join the revolution, see what he could see, kidnap or kill General Jingle William Smith if he got the chance, and finally to make a rendezvous with our airplane at a stipulated time and place.

"Great work!" Hunk told him, keeping his eyes on the rails as the handcar started up.

Behind us the train was just crawling along, maintaining its distance.

"Got plenty of dope," smiled Maximillian. "And I could have conked off Jingle Bill easy, but passed it up! I bet that knocks your hat off, Mr. Gardiner!"

"Hope it doesn't make me decide to knock *your* head off!" Gardiner said grimly, eyes glued to the track. "How come you took it upon yourself to leave the most dangerous enemy we've got in this entire God-forsaken country still at large?"

"Because," Maxy smiled complacently, "he's your greatest friend!"

"What?"

That one word was spoken simultaneously by the entire executive staff of Border Pete.

"That is, in a manner of speaking," stated Mr. O'Grady, basking in the spotlight. "Know

what? For the last three days them guys ain't blowed up a single well! And the general is the hombre that sold Carola and Alazar the idea of putting out an order that any man could loot as much as he could get his hands on, but would be shot without waiting for sunrise if one well or even one hunk of machinery was damaged!"

"That means he figures on working the wells himself!" Hunk said thoughtfully. Then he added with grudging admiration, "That fellow's got *size!*"

"It would also seem to mean"—Monte's voice came from behind us—"that they're pretty sure they can win!"

"Damned if they ain't sure, and damned if they ain't maybe right!" caroled Mr. Maximillian Juarez O'Grady, to whom this war seemed something staged for private delectation. "Know what else? There ain't nothin' goes on anywheres they don't know! Every Mex there is, seems like, is a spy for 'em and gets 'em the news—"

"What about this train?" demanded Hunk. "There's Farazan Junction ahead, so make it snappy!"

"I don't know," Maxy acknowledged. "I don't think they knowed about it last night, when I left 'em flat, but if they don't by now it's a miracle."

"Suppose they do—have they got any men this far north?" I asked.

"Sure, here and there. They got gangs travelin' in trucks that carry their horses along with 'em. And I'll tell you somethin' else. A lot of these gangs are poison when they get off by themselves. I seen one bunch under a guy named Captain Juan Berela—"

"We know him," I interrupted. "The boys in the revolution sure get promoted fast."

"Well, what they did to a poor Mex and his family ain't pretty," Maxy said soberly. "All because they found the wife washin' some oilmen's clothes."

"Here's your road, and there's your truck waiting," Hunk said. Monte started slowing the car. "Tell General Zelaya every detail you can remember. Especially about their communication system. How the hell these separate outfits work together all over the field—"

"Easy," Maxy said, gay again. "They send out riders, pass the news and where it's goin' to the first Mex they run across with a horse, and send him on a sort of made-up relay team. Then this first feller rides on and gits another Mex to chase off towards another gang. Before you know it, because everybody's with 'em, they got the news fannin' out and planted everywheres by horses, truck, foot and bicycle. They got a thousand Mex runnin' their legs off in all directions with messages and orders all the time—"

"O.K.—off you go," Hunk interrupted him, and our entire intelligence system dropped off the car to board the waiting toolpusher for Farazan.

"Wait a minute," bawled Gardiner. "Where's the main body now, including their generals?"

"Forgot to tell you!" yelled Maxy. "Jingle Bill with a troop is s'posed to be around Farazen with the idee of kidnapin' Zelaya and his staff. The main bunch under Carola is just about startin' from Santa Maria in railroad trains now, with a lot of men fanned out on each side of the track. They'll travel slow, cleanin' up as they go."

MONTE shoved our motor to top speed, and we regained our lead on the train. Ahead of us the monte on our left came to the very edge of the track—a tangled mass of luxuriant undergrowth. On the eastern side, to our right toward Farazan it had been thinned to the consistency of a normal, northern woodland, and then dribbled away into fields of growing corn through which could be seen hundreds of stumps.

Here, we felt, was our last danger spot. I took over the scanning of the railroad track, and Monte took the thick jungle to the west, and Hunk the more open stuff to the east. The car was just crawling along, for if there was an explosive charge on the tracks, or other sabotage, here was where it was most likely to be. If so, there would be bandits lurking in the thick monte to take advantage of it. If they couldn't stop the train, they couldn't capture it on the run—not with the men we had on board.

We didn't think that less than a hundred men could capture it unless it was badly damaged. The engineer and fireman were Mexicans, but there wasn't a Federal soldier aboard. If we'd had Federals aboard, we figured we'd be like King Solomon. I understand he hired an army to watch his wives, and then had to hire a second army to watch the first one.

The dangerous stretch was less than five hundred yards long. Then the jungle fanned out again away from the tracks.

Heat waves that made my eyes water shimmered from the rails, but no foreign substance bigger than a small stone and a pile of spare ties could be detected on the narrow right of way. No sign of life came from the jungle, nor was there any suspicious movement from the open country.

A great wave of relief flooded over me as we emerged from the monte-lined stretch of track and picked up speed.

"That train's barely moving through the gap," Monte said a few seconds later. "What it ought to do is hightail it through there—"

Then the flatcar jammed to a stop that nearly broke our necks, and the first real shout I'd ever heard from Monte Mathews was a curse.

"Look at the bastard—*and it's a car with people on it!*" he yelled frantically.

Hunk and I were alongside him in one bound. A single figure in khaki had hurled a package under a passenger car. We could see the wire attached drop to the ground as the bandit darted back into the thick monte.

"Great God Almighty!" Hunk prayed.

Then a dull explosion lifted the front end of the first passenger car ten feet into the air. It fell back to the ground at the right of the track, and toppled over on its side. The shrieks of women and children reached our ears as the second passenger car left the track. It was leaning sideways at a forty-five degree angle, but did not topple over. The rear baggage car carrying the money remained on the track.

I noted, without surprise, that our flatcar was now in reverse, speeding toward the scene. All three of us were standing at the rear—now the front wall of our sturdy little vehicle.

Hunk Gardiner's face was white as he raged, "They could have torn up track or blown up the engine or one of the baggage cars—"

"In addition to getting the gold," Monte said with taut lips, "they wanted to kill as many oilmen as possible. Look at them—"

"Look at the engine!" I interjected.

We found out later that the explosion had blown out the coupling-pin between the front baggage car and the first passenger car. Free of the dynamited car and bearing down on us at increasing speed came the engine, tender and first baggage car.

"The damned fool will keep us away from there!" Hunk bellowed.

Monte had brought the handcar to a stop. We waved our hands frantically in an effort to slow down the little locomotive. Instead, it increased its speed. Our toy armored car would never reach the battleground.

"Throw off the guns and jump for it!" yelled Hunk.

We did so—not forgetting ammunition—and by the time we hit the cinders the engine was thundering down on us from only five hundred feet away. The engineer and fireman were both leaning out of their cabs on opposite sides. I had a rifle in my hands and bawled into Monte's ear, "If we shoot that yellow-bellied engineer, maybe the fireman will stop the damned thing."

"You take him!" he yelled, and jumped across the track.

The engineer was on my side, and I aimed carefully for a full second, maybe more. I never could use a rifle like my daddy could, but I was fortunate enough to hit him.

I had just time to leap across the track, where Monte was making the gesture of pulling back a throttle. I turned my back to the oncoming engine and aimed my rifle down the track. I was endeavoring to indicate to the fireman that perhaps I might wing him from the rear.

Instantly the engine began to slow down. We discovered later that when the engineer's body slumped—turned out I had hit him in the heart—it had pulled the throttle halfway closed. The fireman completed the job.

A split second later the cowcatcher tossed our little flatcar high in the air, and the locomotive screeched to a stop. The fireman stayed in his cab, hands high in the air. It is perhaps not strange that none of us noticed the airplane passing high overhead.

"Help us throw these guns on the coal car!" Hunk bellowed through cupped hands.

He signaled, beckoning the engine back to where we were. I ran forward to supervise the operation. A couple of minutes later the three of us were sprawled behind and on top of piles of coal, and behind us guns and boxes and belts of ammunition were sliding around on top of the stuff. Then the fireman backed our one-car train toward the carnage a quarter of a mile away.

CHAPTER VI

THE END OF JINGLE BILL

IF anyone had noticed our activities, he gave no sign. We were peering over the side of the car, and saw fifty men spread out alongside the wrecked train. At least forty of them were assigned to the money car, under the orders of a slim fellow with insignia on his shoulders. These men were apparently bargaining with the twenty tough guards we had inside with the money, under the command of Kid Laird and Young Kid.

A few revolutionists were trying half-heartedly to open up the wrecked coach. Oilmen were swarming out of the other one, throwing

A WORD TO THE WISE

Waste paper is still an important war material—it's essential for packing ammunition. So in order to make sure there's enough left over to go 'round for your favorite publication, don't forget to save all waste paper and turn it in for scrap or sell it to your junk-dealer.

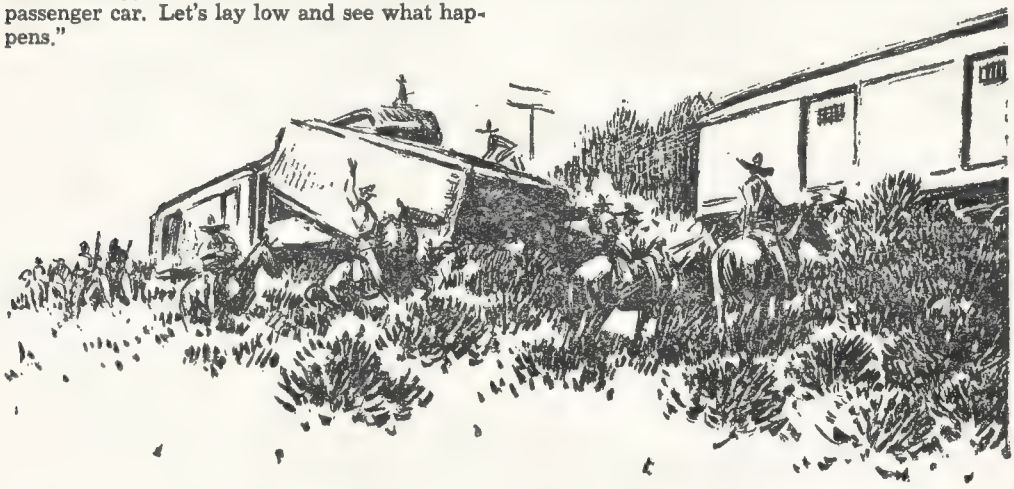
down their arms so that they could answer the shrieks of the trapped women and children in the car lying on its side. The Mexicans allowed them to assist.

Suddenly Hunk let out a yell. "By God, if that fellow bossing the job isn't Juan Berela!"

I was looking the other way, and didn't turn my head. Instead I said, "Look around, and see whether you see what I see!"

They turned and saw, riding toward the wreck *from the east,* through the thin undergrowth, a huge figure on a black horse that could be no one but General Jingle Bill. Behind him were two dozen men, and alongside him was the portly figure of General Alazar.

Monte crawled over beside me and said into my ear, "I figured that if Jingle Bill had bossed this robbery, he wouldn't have dynamited a passenger car. Let's lay low and see what happens."



The fireman stopped two hundred feet from the stalled train. Alert as three cats at a rats' nest, we lay concealed, machine guns ready. The cries of the people inside the overturned coach were not pretty to hear, but there was no fire, and the captured oilmen were at work.

Now we could see that Jingle Bill was slapping Alazar's horse with the barrel of his gun, and that the former Federal *jefe* of Farazen was looking very unhappy indeed. In the contingent behind them were familiar Huabrache faces.

At the head of his men General Smith of the revolutionary army—the real, nationwide revolution—tore between us and the wreck, stopped his horse close to Captain Juan Berela, dismounted and strode up to him.

That slim stalk of poisonous weed shrank back a little, talking and gesturing eagerly. For answer, Jingle Bill's fist smashed to the Mexican's jaw.

I heard a sympathetic grunt from Hunk as Berela stiffened, and started to fall forward. A left uppercut straightened him up again. Then Jingle Bill's right came forward, almost slow enough to see it. It turned Berela's face into a piece of red mush. As he fell forward, the gigantic Dutchman caught him, lifted him over his head, and hurled the unconscious badman at least fifteen feet. It would have been further, but the trunk of a tree was in the way.

What we all knew was a corpse slid limply to the ground.

"Well played!" Hunk said with simple pleasure.

All activity, except rescue work by the oilmen, had ceased while uneasy revolutionists watched the spectacle. Now it started again, as Jingle Bill bawled orders. He turned toward us, and Hunk and Monte and I couldn't believe our eyes despite what we had seen.

If ever there was a human being gone berserk, it was the blond adventurer. I would have sworn that the man was made of marble and icewater. Now I'd have taken oath that his eyes were two searchlights. His face was a twisted, almost tragic mask. Every pore seemed to be shooting sparks, and the timbre in that voice was enough to make the corpse of Juan Berela shiver.

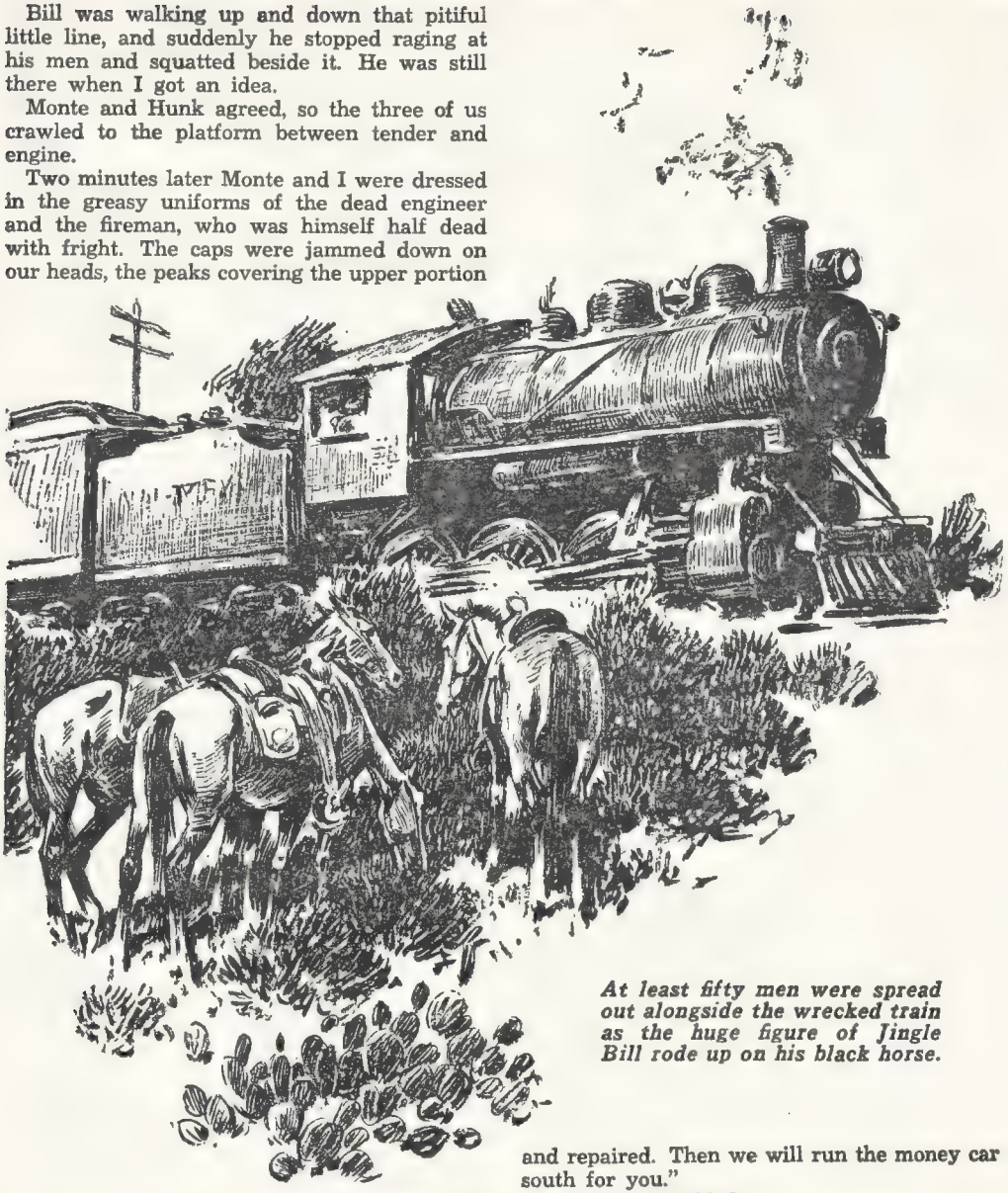
He raged up and down like some gargantuan tiger. Alazar said something to him, and one punch stretched Bill's fellow general prone on the ground, not to move again for twenty minutes.

And now half a hundred shamefaced peons swarmed over the wrecked car. From pack animals came the tools of men living on the march—axes and chisels and crowbars, and from their belts or saddles machetes were drawn. They pried open windows and sliced away at the wooden sides and roof of the coach. Soon women and children were coming out of a dozen openings, and some of them had to be handed out. At least half were laid on the ground, and a few were never to move again.

Bill was walking up and down that pitiful little line, and suddenly he stopped raging at his men and squatted beside it. He was still there when I got an idea.

Monte and Hunk agreed, so the three of us crawled to the platform between tender and engine.

Two minutes later Monte and I were dressed in the greasy uniforms of the dead engineer and the fireman, who was himself half dead with fright. The caps were jammed down on our heads, the peaks covering the upper portion



At least fifty men were spread out alongside the wrecked train as the huge figure of Jingle Bill rode up on his black horse.

of faces so grimy with coal dust that an X-ray could not have revealed our identities.

Hunk, whose architecture would have identified him if he had been wearing a wig and a Mother Hubbard, crouched out of sight in the cab to guard our priceless fireman.

Monte and I started down the track for the wreck.

We had both spoken Spanish for many years. I learned it on the Border at the same time I learned English. So we walked up to a one-eyed colonel and said, "We wish to help the revolution. We think the track can be cleared and repaired. Then we will run the money car south for you."

"Good," he nodded.

"You will inform the general?"

"Immediately."

He walked away toward Jingle Bill and we went on to inspect the passenger coach next to the money car. I proceeded on back to the ex-mail car. Another colonel was shouting an ultimatum to the guardians within.

"You will come out, hands in the air, or we will set fire to the car," the little squirt said.

"Come within twenty feet of this car and three machine guns will mow you down!" came the voice of Kid Laird.

He was peering out a barred window. In

order to let him identify my voice I shouted, "In a few minutes this car will be rolling up the track again!"

While he stared at me, and Young Kid's face appeared behind him, I winked. And they both winked back, grinning.

I took a look at the coupling. It seemed to be undamaged, and I'd been around oil-town freight sidings enough to know a little about it.

Then Monte fell silent, and I couldn't move. Alone in that mob of revolutionists, with our enemy striding toward us, we could do nothing but stand and wait. There were half a dozen Huabrache men in that mob who would have wasted less than ten seconds in going to work on us. Our fate was out of our own hands.

I scarcely recognized the face and eyes coming toward us. I have never seen, before or since, the amount of pain in human eyes which was mirrored in the slant gray ones bent upon us. It was as though all the feeling of guilt which had been accumulating in his subconscious for a lifetime had been released, and was concentrated there.

"You can couple the car ahead to this one, and move the money?" he said absently.

The eyes of Monte and myself were on the ground in an effort to avoid recognition. I croaked, "Yes, General."

There was a moment of silence. The colonel and a captain were standing at a respectful distance. Ordinary soldiers were having violent discussions. A large number of them didn't like the idea of letting the gold get out of their hands—the hell with the revolution!

The silence lasted so long that I could not resist the temptation to cock a snook at Jingle Bill. Monte did the same thing at the same time.

One look, and where my heart had been was just an aching hole.

The gray eyes sweeping from me to Monte held recognition in them. A sort of sad little smile played around his mouth, as though in regret for what he had to do to the two spies before him. He knew, as well as we, that with the excuse of an official revolution those Mexicans wouldn't waste any time on us. And he himself had been made into a bandit by us, from his point of view.

For a full fifteen seconds we stared at each other. Then he took two paces forward. He was almost touching us when he spoke.

And what he said damned near made it necessary for him to catch me to keep me from falling down. His exact words, spoken in low tones, were, "Good luck, kid!"

"Huh?" I gasped.

Beside me Monte was taking a very long breath indeed.

"I'm sick of these murdering swine," Bill said. "I'll help all I can, and then I'll surrender."

The next second he was issuing crisp orders.

I looked at Monte and said stupidly, "He's handing back three million dollars—"

"And maybe the lives of us all," Monte nodded. "Those women and children over there have softened the heart of the heathen."

A HALF hour later, with the aid of some dynamite, the track was cleared except for the money car. Naturally the boys in the car were now cooperating, and they threw off two rails and a few ties and spikes wherewith to replace the rails ruined by the explosion.

It was a matter of a few minutes to get the track usable. Jingle Bill was lashing his half-mutinous men into line at a safe distance. We walked ahead, and Monte played fireman, the real fireman played engineer, and Hunk and I played possum on the floor of the cab.

Jingle Bill came forward as though to supervise the easing of the cars together. He made certain that the automatic coupling-pin was in place between the claws.

He picked some men to carry the wounded women and ten hurt children into the money car. The three dead kids he carried into that car with his own hands.

I cannot be certain, but I think there were tears in his eyes.

The unhurt survivors of the dynamited car, and those from the one we had blasted to clear the rails, were placed in the car next to the engine.

General Smith shouted his order-of-the-day to his glowering revolutionists.

"No guards will be necessary—no one can escape from the locked cars, and the territory south of here is ours. To every man of you I promise that one thousand pesos will be presented personally by General Carola, tomorrow. To officers, two thousand pesos. Start riding south to meet the headquarters train at Juareco. *Viva la revolución!*"

Then he swung himself aboard the locomotive and into our power.

"I would suggest that you go south for a little, and then start north so you can pass these men at high speed," he said. "They must not be allowed to shoot at the train while it is starting."

There were lines around his mouth I had never seen. He had aged ten years in ten minutes. That bland face had collapsed, and there was something in those dumbly suffering eyes that kept us silent as the fireman-engineer backed the train down the track.

Not until it stopped a mile south, and was gaining headway northward did Hunk Gardiner say gruffly, "The holdup wasn't your idea, eh, Bill?"

"It was. I told them to blow up a length of track after the pilot car had passed, and then force the engineer to back the train south to meet our train."

"But our friend Juan Berela had to kill himself some oilmen," Hunk nodded.

"Pedro, Juan, those dead children—it is too much," Jingle Bill said wearily.

"You've saved us three million dollars, which is a lot more than you've cost us," Hunk yelled above the roar of our engine. "And maybe I got a little too tough and greedy with your boys. I don't think you need to worry about what will happen to you."

Jingle Bill didn't seem to care, and then we forgot such matters. Our train was rocketing through a hail of bullets from a hundred absolutely insane Mexicans. They were so anxious to kill us that they didn't concentrate on crippling the engine, which saved all our lives. Luckily everyone behind us was lying flat on his stomach, and none of them got hurt. The fireman was wounded slightly, and I got winged in this left arm. I don't mind the slight stiffness—it gives me a good alibi for the fact that I can't seem to break seventy-five at golf.

And it turned out that the time they wasted on us was their undoing. That airplane we hadn't noticed had landed at Farazan and given General Zelaya the lay of the land. So right after we ran the gauntlet, our troops rounded up the gang.

And there is no doubt that the loss of that treasure rather broke the back of that particular revolution. It petered out in our territory before a month was out.

As we *clickety-clacked* along north, Hunk Gardiner summed up the oil business in that time and territory—and a lot of other places—when he said, "It's a hell of a lot harder down here to keep a quarter of a million dollars than it is to make it!"

DUE to our intercession, the oil companies forgave Jingle Bill, but they have been completely unable to forget him to this day, for very good reasons. He is Sir Wilhelm ter Smit, British citizen but President of Imperial Dutch Petroleum. That's right—the "Vild Villy" Smit who burned American companies' tails in many parts of the world, but whom we froze out of Colombia and Venezuela. You probably do not know that he is to orphanages, scholarship funds, research on children's diseases and general juvenile welfare movements, what Andy Carnegie was to libraries. Those three kids did not die in vain.

When he's in this country he always comes to an island Hunk and Monte and I bought for hunting and fishing purposes. This celebration of my first anniversary as president of Amalgamated is like those get-togethers—an opportunity to get a little plastered and relive the days when I was where I ought to be now—on the firing line.

They won't let me go—they say I'm more valuable where I am now. Jingle Bill's older than I am, but he directed all that sabotage in the Dutch East Indies and I should be doing things like that. Instead, the whole world seems a chain of goddamn desks—here and Caracas and Teheran and soon Singapore and Batavia and probably somewhere in Alaska. Of course my desk in WPB in Washington won't be necessary then. I'm glad to occupy it three days a week, but it's still a desk.

And I guess the stockholders of Amalgamated, and Don Nelson in Washington, and even Mr. Big himself might be annoyed if they knew how often, when I am sitting around desks, my thoughts stray to the days when I was putting plaster statues on privies and wondering whether a *jefe* with a hangover would start something and half hoping he would.

But as I said, down there in that little war none of us could seem to help ourselves from drifting into it, and this war today reminds me of it.

How'll it come out? Well, people like Berela and Sarolla got what was coming to them, and what we conceived to be the right side won—but eventually lost because we didn't play it smartly. We wanted too much for ourselves and too little for the other fellow.

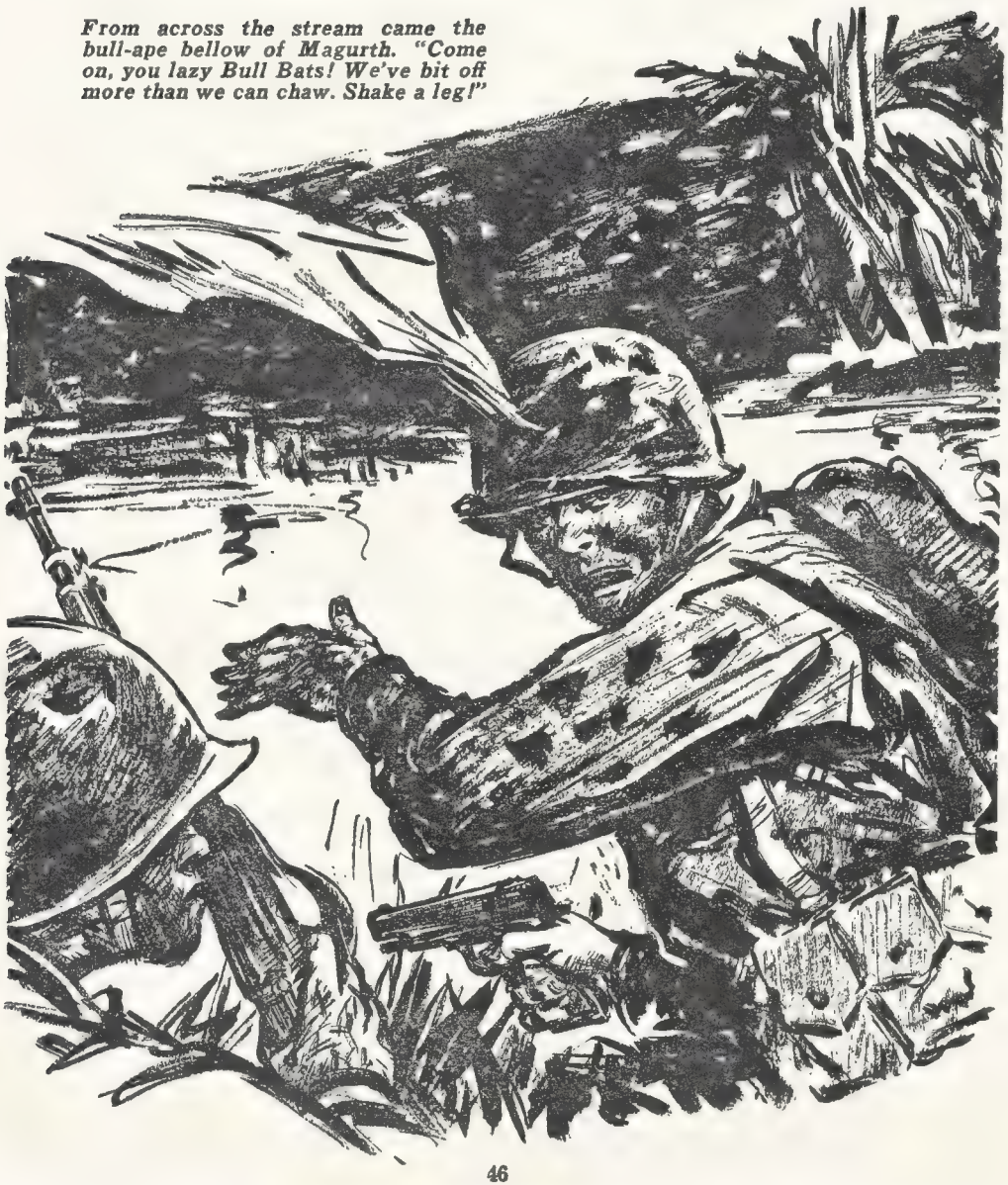
And those of us who made that mistake in Mexico, and have maybe a little influence on what will happen after this war, shouldn't make the same mistake again.

. . . .Hell, yes, make it a double one, plenty of ice. I'm just getting started.

Battle Condition

By

RAY MILLHOLLAND



From across the stream came the bull-ape bellow of Magurth. "Come on, you lazy Bull Bats! We've bit off more than we can chaw. Shake a leg!"

THE Bull Bats were stopped cold. Which is just another way of saying that one of the fightingest companies of the Marine Corps was stacked up against a superior enemy force thoroughly dug into a strong position and jeeringly confident of its ability to take on an entire regiment of Marines just for the exercise.

But if the Bull Bats were not advancing, neither were they having any truck with the notion of retreating. They lay flat on their bellies and studied with unhurried professional interest a three-hundred-yard stretch of open grass between them and a small stream. Beyond the stream was a thin fringe of trees. Beyond that was a Jap air strip, the assigned objective of the Bull Bats.

ILLUSTRATED BY PETER KUHLHOFF

Privates Deal and Magurth lay behind a chunk of volcanic rock which was being systematically dusted by an enemy sniper.

"Yeah, I seen the new skipper doing his bood-war stuff this morning," Private Magurth was saying as he plowed the dirt from under his fingernails with a convenient jungle thorn. He broke the one he was using and plucked another. "He shaved hisself, and then he sprinkled foo-foo in his hand from a pretty green bottle and rubbed it all over his face."

Private Deal was paying no attention to either the recital of the details of his new captain's morning toilet nor to the girlish falsetto in which Magurth recited them. Deal was completely concerned with removing the last speck of dust from the sights and action of his star-gauged Springfield rifle. It was all right for Magurth to leave his rifle lying in the dirt, because Magurth was a bayonet fighter. But Deal was champion long-range shot of the regiment and was expecting Sergeant Keegan to crawl his way any moment toward that fringe of trees along the stream and say, "There's nine of them monkeys gumming the detail. Go get 'em, Deal."

"Then I seen the new skipper take a little sandpaper stick and fix his cute pinkies," continued Magurth. "I was waiting to see if he wore lace on his skivvies when—"

"Batten that big hatch before you fall in and drown yourself, Magurth," came a growled order from the brush behind the pair. Sergeant Keegan wriggled into view and nodded to Private Deal. "Got a pretty good idea where them monkeys are treed up, Deal?"

Private Deal rubbed the heel of his hand along his rifle stock and nodded.

"O.K., start on the left and work down the line," said Sergeant Keegan, as if assigning his man to mess duty for the day. "These guys are the best shots we've stacked up against yet, so don't show any more of your meat than you have to. Get going, because we're going across that crick tonight yet, regardless."

Sergeant Keegan vanished, as shadowlike as he had appeared.

Magurth nodded to Private Deal and jerked a grimy, calloused thumb toward the underbrush. "That guy Keegan could steal the pipe organ outta a church and the whole congregation expecting him to. But I was telling you about the new skipper. He's something pretty to watch when he runs a comb through them wavy blond bangs of his'n. I've shelled down six-bits to glim a strip act that weren't no prettier."

Magurth stopped heaping ridicule on the new commanding officer of the Bull Bats to frown at the way Private Deal kept pushing his sweating palms over his knees. "Look, kid, you ain't scared or nothing?"

Private Deal wasn't a day over nineteen but his eyes were the eyes of a man who has lived a lifetime and seen much he would rather forget.

"Sure, I'm scared," he admitted with complete frankness. "I'm going out there and try to kill nine or ten Jap snipers. Every one is just as good a shot as me. That's a ten to one shot. Sure, I'm scared."

Magurth turned his short, powerful body with its extravagantly long arms which had given him at least a foot reach on very Jap bayonet fighter he had met—surprised them to death, was the way Magurth would have put it—and his small, close-set eyes traveled from head to foot over Deal's obviously relaxed body.

"I'd give a month's pay just to be scared limber once," he said. "What's it like being scared, kid?"

Deal shook his head. "I never read words in a book that could tell how I feel. I guess it's like after you've swallowed a big hunk of ice, only it won't melt in your belly. You just keep feeling colder and colder."

Magurth hooked the sweat from around his neck with a crooked forefinger and sighed enviously. "To be scared stiff—cold, like that right now, I'd trade two months' pay and the rest of my beer ration for this hitch!"

Deal drew one knee under him, placing his left hand on the ground and holding his sniper's rifle clear with the other. "The stuff I want sent home is wrapped up in that hunk of tapa cloth for my sister. The rest of my gear you can pass around to the gang. So long, Magurth."

"Nix, I'm coming too," snapped Magurth. "I ain't had any bay'net work since we hit this island. Besides, kid, I ain't letting you get clipped out there and nobody to pack you back to our lines, see?"

Deal tapped the earth at Magurth's outstretched feet. "You're staying right here, damn your guts. I might just as well get on a mule and ride out there in the open as let you tag along."

"O.K., kid." Magurth yawned, rolled over on his back and pulled his dented helmet over his eyes. "I'll send your stuff home, soon's our gear catches up with us. Belly shots, remember. The target's bigger than a Jap's small head."

Private Deal snaked his way through the fringe of undergrowth bordering the open swale. He worked his way to the extreme left of the Bull Bat's line and flattened out beside Corporal Finkle.

"I COULD scrub and wash clothes and have 'em dry since Sergeant Keegan promised you was coming right away yet," snapped Corporal Finkle. For a moment, the corporal's indignation overcame his caution. He sat bolt upright and shook a lean finger at Private Deal. "Just once I would like to have you and that good-for-nothing Magurth in my squad! It would take me six weeks, but I would make Marines out of you."

A Jap sniper's bullet skirled off Corporal Finkle's battle helmet. He flattened out and flung an angry warning to his squad. "First one that laughs gets four days extra duty as captain of the heads!" The next instant he was all business—pointing straight ahead at the fringe of trees along the stream.

"That big forked one, leaning over the river—"

"That's only a crick," corrected Private Deal, unconsciously.

"River, crick—only it don't sound out of you like it's spelled in my kid's geography," snapped Corporal Finkle. "It makes no difference to me. All I want is you should knock off that yellow-faced monkey with a gun in it that just tried to make an orphan of my kid Leon. Look, I'll show you his picture."

"Some other time," said Private Deal hastily, and wriggled forward through the grass.

He kept going until he was within range of the forked tree, then flattened to squint appraisingly.

"Three hundred," he said to himself as he loosened the slide screw of his rear sight to raise it. "I zero just a half line high and a quarter point, right windage."

"It's seven hundred and yards over," suddenly came Magurth's grunted comment from right beside him.

"Get the hell out of here," said Deal and settled into his rifle sling for a deliberate prone shot.

"My Jap officer's sword against four bits,

pay day, you're shooting under that mustard-faced monkey," said Magurth confidently.

For a moment, Deal lay as if carved from stone. Then his rifle dove back into his shoulder. Before the dust ball raised by the muzzle blast was as big as a man's fist, he had rolled over several times and then began wriggling swiftly through the grass, bearing to the right.

When he paused, panting, to wipe the sweat from his eyes, Magurth spoke up from the grass. "I guess you owe me six bits, unh?"

There came the faint sound of a cracking limb of the forked tree. Then a mottled green body fell with almost eerie slowness—or so it seemed to Deal—and landed with a soft splash in the stream. Almost instantly a Jap light machine gun began searching the spot from which Deal had fired.

Evidently Sergeant Keegan had decided that the machine gun was big enough game to risk expending three precious mortar shells on, for he laid a perfect bracket salvo—one long, one short, and one squarely on the button. The light machine gun spun crazily in the air with a crash back into the underbrush.

Magurth chewed a grass stem and watched with indifferent attention. "You seen the new skipper yet?" he asked Deal.

"Just from the back, when he was handing his orders to the colonel," admitted Deal, without taking his eyes from the fringe of trees.

"That guy ain't never gonna make a Bull Bat," predicted Magurth. "He's too pretty. I seen him using a toothbrush, honest!"

The only comment from Deal was a sudden blast from his rifle, followed by his quick rolling and crawling tactics to vacate his firing position before the enemy could retaliate effectively. But when he flattened out in his new position, there was Magurth, again looking deeply wronged.

"Listen, the muzzle blast from that fusee of yours near blowed my eardrums down my throat," growled Magurth. "I ain't asking you to holler loud enough for them tree-sitters to hear, but at least wiggle an ear before you turn that thing loose again."

"Get back where you belong, Magurth," said Deal, without taking his eyes from the fringe of trees.

"I'm leaving when I get a chanst to carry you back," retorted Magurth. "Stands to reason you can't keep this up all day. Bet you my Jap officer's sword against six bits, pay day, you get it before you knock off Number Nine, up there in that crooked tree what looks like a elephant blowing a trombone in a circus band. Yeah, and them little trees look like the trained pony act prancin' around the elephant's tub. Ever see a three-ringed circus, kid?"

Deal fired and rolled. Magurth, as usual, though having to start without knowing when it was coming, was already relaxed in their new position by the time Deal hit the dirt.

Magurth listened to the crackle of sniper fire converging on their last position, then shook his head pessimistically.

"You gotta get better, kid. You was only half rolled over before a bullet plowed up where your belly just was."

Deal gave Magurth but a brief glance without turning his head. He blew a halo of dust fuzz from his rear sight aperture—possibly more to clear his nose of the sour sweat-reek of Magurth—and said, "What did that foo-foo water the new skipper was using smell like?"

"Like a dame with nothin' but a kimono on," said Magurth, disgustedly. He shifted his bayoneted rifle from his right hand, where he had been carrying it as effortlessly as though it weighed no more than a nail-file, and jerked a grimy thumb over his shoulder. "You watch. Up to now we been fighting like Bull Bats always fights. The new skipper is letting Keegan run things while he is getting onto the ropes. 'Fore you can say jiggers, he'll be passing out orders of his own and we'll have to start fighting from page 78, paragraph 3 in the book. Then the Bull Bats'll be just another Marine outfit again."

Private Deal caught a momentary glimpse of a Jap sniper squarely lined up with his sights and executed a perfect trigger squeeze. But instead of employing his usual tactics of rolling sideways and then crawling to a new position, he remained motionless to his eyelids and watched the mottled green body tumble from its tree.

Several enemy rifles and a second light machine gun savagely raked the sparse grass cover twenty yards to his right. He grinned and rubbed a drop of sweat from the tip of his nose. He had crossed up those babies this time. The firing ceased.

He lay there, waiting for another sniper to betray his position, and listening to the loud banging of his own heart against his ribs.

"One more, and we shove off outta here," he said without turning his head toward Magurth.

No answer from Magurth. That was funny, because the big ape was in a talking mood. . . Magurth's spot was vacant. There was a flattened swath of grass where he had rolled, and a narrow, twisting trail through the grass showing where he had crawled away—directly toward the spot where the Japs had returned the fire.

DEAL took a last regretful look toward the fringe of trees along the stream and crawled away in search of Magurth. He found him trying to sprinkle sulfa powder on a wound where it is hardest for a man to reach himself.

"How bad you hit, Magurth?" asked Deal.

"I won't be sitting on a log for a week, I know

that," grunted Magurth, offering his sulfa powder to Deal. "You try putting it on. And don't be making the hole in my hip no bigger, either. Wait'll I unloose my belt. . . Uh, a fine oil can you turned out to be. Whyn't you sing out them monkeys was gonna spray this place?"

Deal had no time to answer, for Sergeant Keegan had computed his mortar fire data on the last remaining light machine gun nest and was dishing out a five-shell salvo with the usual conclusive results. Then came a shrill whistle from behind them.

"O.K., Deal, we got 'em all. Come on in!" sang out Keegan.

"Quittin' time. Let's go, Magurth," said Deal, taping down a pad over Magurth's wound and hauling his trousers back over it. "Can you make it?"

"Leave me your canteen and a coupla grenades," grunted Magurth.

"You hang onto my belt," suggested Deal, encouragingly. "I can drag you in."

"Nuts with that stuff," snapped Magurth. "Think I'm going to miss this swell chance for some bay'net work?" He nodded toward the Jap lines. "Two hours till dark. Then I'm easing over there and having myself some fun. Betcha I get at least five. Then they'll stampede and start sticking and shooting themselves."

"You heard what Sergeant Keegan said," warned Deal. "He'll keel-haul you if you don't obey orders."

"Dig the mud outta your ears, kid," snapped Magurth, loftily. "He only said for you to come in. Now shove off before I flatten your pretty face with the butt of this." Magurth made a significant gesture with his rifle in reverse.

"I wish you was hit bad," grumbled Deal. "Then I'd haul you in anyways. So long, you crazy ape."

THOUGH he was undetected by the enemy in his withdrawal, Private Deal's approach did not escape the keen eyes of Sergeant Keegan.

"Why'n't you come in walking straight up, waving your shirt on the end of your rifle?" demanded Keegan, scowling to hide his deep sense of relief. He sopped the sweat from his neck and chest with a torn shirt-sleeve. "Nice doing, kid. Special that last time. All them slopeheads was set for you to roll and crawl. I was watching. When I see all them bullets hitting right where you should of was— Never mind. Skipper wants to see you, *muy pronto*."

Sergeant Keegan led the way back to where the new company commander sat making notes in his war diary. The captain's boots were mud-free and glistened with polish. There was even the hint of a crease in his trousers, as though they had just come from his foot locker. He had the only clean-shaven face Private Deal had seen in a week. The captain's battle helmet lay on the ground beside him, exposing carefully groomed, wavy chestnut hair. The captain sure looked the lady-killer Magurth said he was, thought Deal.

"Sir, this is Private Deal I was telling you about," said Sergeant Keegan, by way of introduction. "I scored eight I seen drop personally. And them two machine guns we got with mortar fire exposed their positions trying to smoke him down."

"Your full name and serial number, Deal," said the captain, crisply. "I'm including your work in my report to battalion headquarters."

Deal gave the information, then leaned against a tree with his hand pressed to his belt buckle. He retched, but nothing came up—Deal not having eaten since dawn.

Neither Sergeant Keegan nor the captain noticed. The captain was still writing in his war diary and Sergeant Keegan was concentrating on the best way to give the new commanding officer of the Bull Bats a little tactical advice.

"If it wasn't for Deal here getting them snipers," went on Sergeant Keegan, "we wouldn't be able to rush their position soon's it gets dark and clean 'em out."

The captain looked up curtly. "We're not rushing their position at night, Sergeant, and have our men shooting and bayoneting each other."

Rank or no rank, Sergeant Keegan was confronted with a new company commander who did not seem to realize that if the enemy was permitted time to bring up replacements, crossing that stream by daylight would be plain suicide.

"Sir, the Bull Bats don't go around shooting at night," said Sergeant Keegan respectfully but nonetheless firmly. "They're all night bayonet fighters I trained myself. Except Deal here. He's too good at sniping to risk him spraining an ankle in the dark."

For the first time, the captain noticed Deal still leaning against the tree, a greenish pallor under his tanned complexion.

"Sergeant, this man is a casualty!" exclaimed the captain, jumping up and catching Deal by the arm. "Where are you hit?"

"No place, sir. I'm just sick to my stomach. . . I'm scared sick, I guess."

"A case of extreme battle exhaustion," was the captain's diagnosis for Keegan's benefit. "Send this man to the rear." He patted Deal on the shoulder. "Get the idea out of your head that you're a coward, Deal. You aren't. You've done ten men's work today. You're merely exhausted. In a couple of days you'll be fit again. Nobody but the sergeant and I will know why you were sent back."

Deal looked up and shook his head. "All the other Bull Bats know I get scared sick this way, sir. They just don't pay any attention."

"That's right, sir," chimed in Sergeant Keegan. "Soon's Deal gets something down he can heave back up, he'll be in battle condition again."

"That's right, sir," echoed Deal, anxiously. "If you send me back, those people won't understand. Maybe I won't be able to come back to the Bull Bats at all."

"I'll take it under advisement," said the new captain of the Bull Bats, shaking his head. "But I can't understand a man not jumping at an honorable opportunity to get away from this nasty mess. Especially in your state of physical and mental exhaustion, Deal. . . Keep an eye on him, Sergeant. If Deal doesn't recover by the time the runner starts for battalion headquarters, send him along as—well, as an armed escort."

The captain resumed writing in his diary. Sergeant Keegan jerked his head sideways for Deal to follow and withdrew.

WHEN out of earshot of the captain, Keegan slapped an insect from his neck and growled, "Foo-foo! The stink of it damn near made me feed the fishes myself." Suddenly he stopped and pinned Deal in his tracks with a stern eye. "Where's Magurth?"

"Around some place, I guess," answered Deal, evading that stern eye.

"Where'd you leave Magurth when he got hit?" demanded Keegan, pointing first to a smear of blood on Deal's sleeve and then to his collapsed canteen cover. "You give him first aid and left your canteen with him. He told you not to tell me he'd been out there agin my orders, but cough up. Where's the big ape laying out?"

"He's—well, he said he was fixing to cross the crick after dark and get in some bayonet practice," admitted Deal.

"Must've stopped one with his head that made him dizzier'n ever," growled Keegan.

"No, right here," said Deal, placing a finger just below his hip pocket.

"No wonder he didn't come in," commented Sergeant Keegan, dryly. "This morning I heard Corporal Finkle ribbing him that there was women nurses back at the field hospital and for him to be careful where he got hit."

"Magurth says it's a swell night for a bayonet job," said Deal, not knowing what else to say.

"Perfect," said Keegan, disgustedly. "And tomorrow morning, it'll be plain suicide, rushing that position in broad daylight." He snapped a warning eye on Private Deal. "Keep your hatch closed about hearing me think out loud, understand? These new officers gotta learn the hard way. It's just our bad luck that this one was sent to the Bull Bats too late to educate him gradual."

Neither of them saw the new commanding officer of the Bull Bats standing stock still in a crook in the tunnel-like jungle trail not ten feet away. The captain turned back, white tendons showing through the skin of his knuckles. Keegan moved on for a last check on the remaining supply of mortar ammunition. Deal followed, his sniper's rifle protected by his arms lest a limb or a vine catch on its sights and throw them off.

Midnight found them crouched together in a foxhole. For the sixth time since complete darkness had blanketed the jungle, Keegan reached out and twitched Deal's sleeve and asked in a guarded whisper, "Is that Magurth coming back?"

"No," replied Deal. "It's that same damn lizard pushing around an empty ration can somebody threw away."

At two, Sergeant Keegan cursed Magurth feelingly under his breath and eased back the slide of his sub-machine gun, making sure again that there was a cartridge in the chamber.

"Magurth's met a better night fighter than he thought he was, it looks like," he said, hardly louder than a subdued breath.

It was Deal who plucked the sergeant's sleeve this time. The black jungle air hung like a heavy blanket over them, smelling of rotting vegetation and the acrid man-sweat of the ghostly silent Bull Bats crouched in their foxholes.

"I smell something—like flowers. There ain't no flowers around here that smell like that."

"I burned out my smeller, smokin' too much," grumbled Keegan. "I don't smell nothing but stinks—the godawful stink of this godawful jungle."

"The flower smell is gone," said Deal.

"There ain't a breath of breeze," reasoned Keegan in a guarded undertone. "So, something had to bring that smell—either on legs or wings—and take it away. Whatever did it shoulda made some kind of a sound. Didn't you hear nothin', Deal, or wasn't you paying attention?"

"You been chewing tobacco. I can't hear little sounds when you do that," replied Deal.

"Hell, why didn't you tell me?" growled Keegan. There was a faint thud as his quid hit the earth. "Cripes, what a business! A man can't even chew on this godawful job. When this is over, I'm getting me a job in a boiler factory, where a man—"

A distant cry rent the stillness—a cry that ended in a ghoulish gurgle. Then came the rapid blatting of a Jap officer's pistol across the stream.

"Just four shots," mused Keegan. "Funny, them monkeys ordinary squirt off the whole magazine, once they start shootin' in the dark. "Magurth stuck him, is why," said Deal, completely assured.

Suddenly, there was the flat, heavy bark of a larger weapon. Keegan leaped to his feet.

"That was a Colt .45! And it wasn't Magurth this time, neither. He wouldn't shoot a gun at night if he was at a Coney Island target gallery and gettin' free shots."

But there was no mistaking the bull-ape bellow that came blasting from across the stream. "Come on, you lazy Bull Bats! Me and the new skipper has bit off moren' we can chaw. Shake a leg!"

Sergeant Keegan stabbed his whistle to his lips, wrong end to. Before he could reverse it, a yelp of delight rippled down the line of Bull Bats and the jungle crackled to the rush of plunging men.

Sergeant Keegan hit the shallow stream at the head of his men, the bared blade of his trench-knife gleaming in the faint starlight. Deal, fleet as a deer, was right at his heels, ducked low to protect his sniper's rifle cradled in both arms. Deal had not thought to mount his bayonet.

SERGEANT KEEGAN was the first man across the stream by only a step, for right on his heels the rest of the Bull Bats burst through the fringe of trees and brush and fanned out over what had once been a missionary station clearing. Deal tripped over the skeleton of a crashed Zero and stumbled to one knee.

"Nice dodging kid," came Corporal Finkle's grim compliment from the inky darkness. "I mistook you for a yellow-belly without no bayonet on your rifle. Missed your neck by that much."

Deal bounded on after Sergeant Keegan. He caught up just in time to hear the thud of the sergeant's long knife rip through flesh and cloth and to see the blurred shadow of a human form sink into the grass. The sergeant's knife no longer sparkled in the faint starlight.

It was already dawn before Deal realized he was no longer following the big sergeant of the Bull Bats, by sound and by that eery sixth sense which enables the trained night fighter to distinguish in a split second between friend and enemy. Then, suddenly, there was no more fighting. Sergeant Keegan stood in front of a semi-circle of Bull Bats, looking down at Magurth.

Magurth squatted on guard over his prostrate captain. The officer had one of Magurth's clumsy first-aid bandages around his head and he lay motionless. A dead Jap lay across the captain's foot and another sat crumpled and grinning with unseeing eyes against the wall of a hut.

"How bad?" asked Keegan, flicking his eyes from Magurth to the new captain of the Bull Bats.

Magurth lifted troubled eyes. "I didn't know it was him, honest. He come charging around the corner. Blam, went his gat almost in my face. Natural, my bayonet was already started when I smelled foo-foo. . . Just had time to jerk up my point when he stumbled, smack into my butt plate. Then I heard somethin' kicking in the grass, right behind my back."

Magurth unconsciously rubbed a red powder burn on his neck and nodded approval at the new captain. "I wouldn't be telling you this now if he wasn't the best damn night shot in the business. He picked off that Jap behind me, pretty as anything you'll ever see."

"You're lying, Magurth," cut in Sergeant Keegan, harshly. "I heard you making cracks about the skipper last night. Hand over your rifle, you're under arrest."

"Belay, Sergeant. Magurth is telling the truth." The new captain of the Bull Bats opened his eyes and rose on one elbow to look over the semi-circle of faces gaping down on him. He pulled himself up to a sitting position and motioned to Sergeant Keegan. "Check your wounded and send a runner back for replacements. We've grabbed this place and we're going to hold it."

Sergeant Keegan swung a sardonic eye over the ranks of the tattered Bull Bats, every man of whom was either splashed with his own blood from being raked by jungle thorns, or smeared with the blood of an enemy.

"All you with an arm or a leg off who want to go to the rear, line up on the left." The sergeant waited a grim moment, then turned and saluted his company commander, "Sir, the position seems to have been taken without a casualty."

The new captain rose unsteadily to his feet. He stood bracing himself with one hand against the corner post of the hut.

"I did not allow you to attack last night. I'm going to tell you why: Because I was afraid of night fighting myself. . . Then I heard a Bull Bat—Private Deal here—admit without batting an eye that he was scared sick after that whale of a fighting job he did yesterday."

There was a long pause while the officer met each man's eyes in turn. He braced himself and went on. "Deal gave me a new slant on this fear business. I came out here alone last night. No, that's wrong—I *drove* myself out here last night. I intended to find out if I was half the man Deal was—or you'd find me where I blew out my brains at the spot where I started to run back."

Magurth, who had been paying little attention up to that time because he was absorbed in the more important business of wiping his bayonet with a tattered shirttail, suddenly blurted out, "What's it feel like to be scared? It ain't no gag—I gotta know."

It wasn't squinting in the early morning sunlight that brought crow's-feet to the corner of the new captain's eyes as he turned to Magurth.

"When a man is really scared, Magurth, his

legs turn to rubber and his feet swivel around and point backwards. Then somebody jams a corncob down his throat that he can't swallow or cough up. A big black thing with yellow eyes and teeth as long as your bayonet starts chasing him. That's this thing fear, Magurth."

Magurth shook his head, disappointed. "It musta been something else that happened to me," he said and started walking away.

"Magurth!" barked Sergeant Keegan. "Where in'ell d'you think you're going?"

Magurth pointed a grimy finger toward the stream. "And it ain't nice to ask me why."

"We'll have to take care of that rascal before the Army gets here and somebody gets hurt!" he drawled, straightening up and leisurely focusing his field glasses. "Hit the dirt, men. . . Now Deal, do your stuff. He is up in that forked tree. Head and shoulders just showing in the crotch. Two hundred and fifty yards, I'd say. But use your own judgment."

"Five hundred, if it's an inch," growled Magurth, flopping beside Deal.

"I wouldn't be telling this now if he hadn't picked off that Jap behind me, pretty as anything you'll ever see!"

"You'll take your turn like all the rest of us," snapped Sergeant Keegan.

As one man, the Bull Bats laughed uproariously—each man at himself.

From the further edge of the air strip, a solitary Jap sniper sent a bullet through the new captain's pocket where he carried his shaving kit. Leisurely, he stooped down and picked up his Colt .45.

Deal rolled the bullet of a cartridge between his lips, slipped it into the chamber of his star-gauged Springfield and fired.

"He was two-fifty, you near-sighted ape," he remarked to Magurth.

But Magurth was not paying attention. He was watching a trickle of something most certainly not blood drip from the pocket of the captain's jacket where he carried his shaving kit and splash on the toe of the captain's now dusty shoe.

"Foo-foo!" grunted Magurth, in the tone of a man making a momentous decision. "First thing I do when this war is over is buy a tubful of that stuff and take a bath in it."

Makin's leap ended in a back-dive as he saw the cobra.

EYES IN THE

FOR three days the rains had drummed incessantly on the roof of the old Burmese bungalow outside of Moung Tung. Flight Lieutenant Beaumont, RAF, and his gunner, Sergeant Blount, had come in from the jungle to the town-edge for cover on the first day of the rain. So had a score of other airmen and half a regiment of picked British and Indian jungle troops. The Burma Road was a quag. Even war must stop below the equator when the monsoons strike.

The roof of the old bungalow was broad and sagging. Each day it became soggier from the downpour. There were many rooms in the place—long ago it had been a missionary's dream of a native school—and the mould now thickened upon the walls, especially in those parts of the house unused by the two flyers. Other tenants had also come in for shelter during the rainy season, and these did not mind the damp and mould. Some were footless, others multipeded.

"Speaking of cobras—" Beaumont said, on the third afternoon they'd spent there.

ILLUSTRATED BY EDD ASHE

CORNER

By PAUL ANNIXTER

"Let's not, old man," grimaced Blount, with a hot-weather shiver, symptom of tropic fever in anyone else.

Beaumont had been something of an amateur naturalist back home. He was always picking up native oddities and points of view from servants and the Indian troops to bits of jungle knowledge. He enjoyed them, making the best of them his own.

He resumed in his whimsical tone, "The natives tell me that the rains fill up the cobras' holes in the garden and they like to take up quarters in an old house like this. They're quite used to humans and not unfriendly, they say, if a chap has the right attitude toward them—"

"'Cozy," muttered Blount. "So they're the people I keep hearing rattling around in the rafters."

"Cobras aren't noisy."

"I didn't meant that they snore or crack nuts," said Blount.

"They tell me we're not supposed to kill 'em. Part of the native religion—"

"If there's anything loose around here that isn't part of the native religion, it hasn't infiltrated on my observation."

Their talk was give and take, in low tones. There was the air about it that it could stop just as well as go on, and that there was nothing in the world to laugh at. These two had a way of merging into the job at hand, past the need of words, like a single creature with a two-sided brain and four hands. The tension and vicissitudes of countless days of pulling together in high sky against an utterly ruthless enemy had curiously coupled their two natures. Blount now picked up the thread again.

"Maybe they're not noisy, old man, but you don't have to put your ear to the wall to hear what I'm talking about, and I know a cockroach when I hear one—Birmingham or Burmese . . . I say, look up there."

THE ceiling-cloth just now couldn't be said to be behaving naturally. It bellied slowly downward. A movement at first perceptible in the hollow became a faint line which their eyes followed from the center across to the edge of the room.

"Have you seen that before?" Beaumont inquired.

"Not to any monotonous degree."

"There's a lady one in the greenroom now, I noticed."

"One what?"

"Cobra."

"And just where is this location?" Blount asked.

"That brick-floored room where the two water jars stand. It's turned green since the rains started," said Beaumont.

"I thought somebody was fixing to grow mushrooms in that little nook," Blount murmured. "What's a she-cobra doing in there?"

"Starting housekeeping in one of the ollas, by the look. I watched her half an hour this morning, but she didn't come out."

They tiptoed into the neglected room where light and smell were evil.

"She was in that far jar in the corner when I left," Beaumont whispered.

They spread out a leather coat upon the oozy bricks and sat down to watch and listen, for there was nothing else to occupy them. The rain drummed and dripped. The mustiness of the old house breathed upon them like a sickness. The two men fixed themselves for silence as easily as Hindu holy men and fell away into it, eyes open, thinking of home, each in his own way. The rains had infected even their hard grain with nostalgia.

Beaumont's dark secret was that he was only twenty-four, with name, fame and decorations still to be won. He was easy, quiet, a finished pilot and handler of men, situations and of himself. Blount was eight years older, probably the more courageous of the two, because he was highly nervous and imaginative to start with, and did not take naturally to the air. There was something special about both of them. Flyers get something, up off the ground.

They had been watching for many minutes when, instead of empty space, the head of a cobra was before their eyes. It hadn't appeared exactly, it had materialized—the length of a man's hand above the rim of the water jar. The single eye which they could see showed awareness, without surprise or anger or fear. The hood was not fully dilated; the sense the men drew was that of haughty disdain. They did not see the movement, but the head was turned more directly to them a moment later, the hood flared a little more. The underside now had a curiously froggy look, though the innocence of a frog was lacking.

Both Beaumont and Blount felt the inclination to fall into a reverie, as they sat in the gloom watching. Each sensed the extraordinary ease with which time was passing. They may have sat there an hour before there was a patter of nailed pads outside and a scratching at the door.

"Lord, don't let Makin's in," said Blount, his hand reaching up to hold the knob. "I say, look at her blaze now!"

The cobra was red-eyed, in fuller expression of rage.

"The Makin's" was a compact fox-terrier belonging to Quartermaster Daggett, of the commissary, who had stored some of his duffle in one of the empty rooms of the house. He was a small dog, who continually thrilled his fit, wiry self with all the sensations he could register, racing the gamut of adventure full-length. He had found more and more to occupy him in the decaying bungalow as time passed; even in his naps he kept one sharp ear cocked for trouble, and the hollow walls were full of it.

The quartermaster was a slow man, very good in his work among the men and supplies, but with little imagination or interest in the creatures of the wild. He demanded obedience from the Makin's and got same. In fact, that small party obeyed to the letter—to the point of taking no responsibility for what might result. Though Daggett came first with him, Makin's had developed a fine fondness for Blount and was forever trying to share the latter's bunk. Right now he was looking for his second in command. The two men answered his importunate scratching, letting themselves out very carefully so the Makin's couldn't charge past.

"I wonder what he'd have done in there—dive right into the cobra's jar?" Blount idly inquired.

"I wonder what she'd do," said Beaumont. "Cobras don't mind humans a whole lot; I'm convinced of that. The natives have protected them so long. But this one was furious at the noise Makin's made."

THE two men grew accustomed to the activities in the walls of the bungalow and above the ceiling-cloths. Numerous times on entering the "greenroom" they saw the she-cobra again, standing upright like a slim, dark wand, with clubbed head and beady gleaming eyes, in or near the big corner jar. They presumed she had a nest there, but did not attempt to investigate.

There were other manifestations, too—feelings and sounds not altogether explainable. The Makin's had done a lot of scurrying about, in and under the house, and time and again they had heard his annoyed and clamorous barking. When they answered the insistent summons they found nothing, or found the terrier growling with hair on end and staring into some cranny among the shadows beyond their range of vision. But they drew their conclusions. They tried to keep the dog away from the house as much as possible, but Makin's was about as easy to restrain as so much quicksilver. So they took on by degrees the fatalistic attitude of the natives regarding such matters. At least, Beaumont did.

The rainy weeks were made of slow and dragging days. The weather was breathlessly hot between showers, and the prolonged gloom ground more deeply upon the nerve-ends of the white men than upon the strangers within their gates. Daggett, when he was about, worried constantly and single-mindedly about his mired supply trucks. Beaumont worried about his plane. He went forth to inspect it many times a day, wiping its metal parts, coating the motors with oil to protect them against the water. Blount did the same with his guns.

Blount was fighting his own private war these days, with himself, over a thing he would not willingly have admitted to anyone—an inherent horror of snakes. He kept it hidden as best he could, but as the days wore on, Beaumont began to see that his friend was not doing well. Then one night he saw a light and heard movements from Blount's room and went down the hall for a look-see.

Blount was sitting on his bunk in a sweat, peering into the shadows, a revolver in his hand. His face was haggard. Beaumont sat down beside him.

"What's the trouble, man? Not sleeping?"

Blount gave a short disparaging laugh. "Sleep? I've scarcely had an hour a night for the past week." He turned fever-bright eyes on his friend. "You may as well know it now—probably guessed it, anyhow. I've been in a royal funk ever since our lady of the water jar gave us the eye from that dark corner of hers. Just the idea of snakes. I keep hearing noises at night—then I'm up watching. Never known anything like it . . ."

He was watching Beaumont's face for signs of the uncomprehending disgust so many men would have shown. Instead, Beaumont was chuckling, his hand on Blount's knee, fingers gripping.

"Jock, you're a braver man than I, for coming out with it like that. That takes real courage. Nerves? Good lord, they've ridden me night and day. You can give me Japs or Jerries for these puff-worms any day. But we'll be out of this soon. The rains can't hang on forever."

Things were better after that midnight talk; confession worked its usual miracle. Blount even got to sleeping again.

He awoke on the twelfth morning with a feeling of weight on his right leg. There was an ache back of his eyelids also—for the first time in many days—from the glow of the sun in the east window of his room. Real daylight again, rains shoved back for the forenoon at least. Blount realized this in a slow, fragmentary way. He drew his leg out from under the weight and turned over. He was never rightly awake until he set foot on the floor.

"Makin's is pretty quiet this morning," he thought drowsily, drawing his knees up luxuriously . . . Probably Beaumont, who had been restless, would want to overhaul the plane and take a tramp into the bush . . . He was coming down the hall now. Blount heard his door creak, but kept his eyes shut a delicious moment longer. Then he opened them and looked, but no one was in the aperture. Had he been dreaming that Beaumont had come to call him? Then he heard more steps in the hall. No doubt

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about it now—Beaumont in the doorway, his camera in his hand. Photography was a burning hobby of Beaumont's since he had come out East.

"Hello," said Blount, yawning.

The other didn't speak, but kept glancing at the foot of the bunk. Blount began to extend himself.

"Easy—easy, Jock," Beaumont said softly, as if to a frightened colt. "Easy does it, don't stretch!"

Now Blount raised his head above the bedclothes and looked out. His face blanched.

THE cobra at the foot of the bunk raised her head also, the hood flaring ever so slightly. Blount was a good six feet long; the snake slightly less than that, and coiled on the canvas covering within striking distance of his face. For two or three dragging seconds the two stared at each other; then the man's lips moved, while his hands lifted slowly to his chin, under the covers. His fingers closed upon the edges of the canvas and blanket.

"So long," he said thickly, and disappeared.

Beaumont slowly turned at sound of steps in the hall. The Burmese boy had come to announce breakfast.

"Bring the shotgun, Migi," Beaumont ordered quietly. He added gently, "It's up to you, Jock. Shall I take a chance and shoot some of this with the camera? The light's tempting—" His camera was the compact miniature motion-picture type.

"You're the judge," said Blount in muffled tones.

"She doesn't look aggressive," Beaumont went on. "She's house-broke, not man-shy . . . just warming herself. But I'm not making a move until Migi has her covered. It's my judgment she'll stand for a picture without getting sore."

"Go ahead and influence yourself," muttered Blount.

"I'll wind her in alone first. After that, maybe you can come on—that is, you can look out, as you did before."

"Carry on," muttered Blount.

It was not unlike the touch-and-go minutes of combat duty. Now Migi returned, carrying the shotgun. His face looked gray and patched in the morning light. With fumbling fingers he opened the piece at the breech, closed it with a click, and tiptoed into the room. Not until then did Beaumont give his attention to the camera. With soft, accurate movements he adjusted the light, focused the lens and began to wind film.

The cobra had turned to the camera. She rose as before, the hood dilated. The single black eye that Beaumont watched slowly isolated itself in its own brightness, gleaming like a bit of polished tourmaline. All else became shadowy. That eye hung still and remote, its stillness not stationary, but rather the poised, dynamic stillness of a star.

"Easy now, old man. Migi's got her covered. We'll hold her attention. Take it gently. Pull down the covers just enough to look out as you did before—early morning scene, dark bungalow, central Burma. Jove, this will tickle a lot of folks back home!"

The tips of Blount's fingers lowered the covering from his face. His tousled head lifted slowly.

"That's the technique," said Beaumont as he wound. "No sudden movements. Look her in the throat, not in the eye."

All simple enough so far, just a little daybreak episode caught for the edification of the folks back home—but Quartermaster Daggett and the Makin's stepped into the hall just here. Beaumont quickly shut the door into the hall, but not quite in time. All dewy from the wet ferns, with gleaming morning face, the Makin's darted past Beaumont's foot to find Blount, his friend of friends. Makin's saw Blount, skidded a little on the bare boards as he put on the brakes, then leaped from the center of the floor to land for embrace on Blount's chest—all the more joyous to note the man already in the game, humped and hiding under the covers. It was in mid-air that Makin's first saw the cobra bending toward him with a cherishing look. Joy went out of him, his leap finished in a back-dive and a yelp as he landed wrong-side up.

The ten-gauge shotgun in the houseboy's hands roared like a cannon indoors, but the hooded head had left the line of his fire that instant to lance at the terrier. She had fallen short, but like a loop of dirty water she spilled off the bed to the floor, having taken the war-path after the dog with not a single secondary thought.

Migi was fumbling with a reload. Beaumont glanced at him coldly—that frosty look that went with danger—but he didn't stop winding film. Meantime Makin's had begun a series of squirrel-cage revolutions over and under Blount's bunk. Always as he came up top he would give a grieved bark toward the head of the bed, but couldn't stop for answer before the cobra would appear. It was a great temptation with his man-friend under cover, waiting to be hunted out, but the fool field behind never paused. No chance to halt and burrow.

For a minute or two Makin's evidently entertained the idea that he might outdistance the enemy, gain time in one round to dig the man out, but the swollen head always reared behind too soon. Migi moaned that the empty shells in his piece were jammed or rusted in. Quartermaster Daggett was now at the door and Beaumont's voice was directed his way.

"Just in time, Daggett. Fetch us a good gun, will you? Then call your dog off to the hall."

Makin's, meanwhile, weary of his system,

started a feinting dash toward the hall door. It was all the same to the cobra. She had all day to wreak vengeance. Then the terrier doubled back and with a yelp of delight leapt toward the narrow rift in the bedclothes just as Blount's head popped out for a look. It was a matter of one small dog's life, no less. The man let him in.

At the same time Daggett boomed from the hall, "Come on, kid! Here, Makin's!"

"Not yet, Daggett!" Beaumont called. "Bring the gun!"

BUT a struggle was on under the bedclothes, the terrier having been taught to obey.

"Hold him, Blount!" Beaumont yelled. "Roll over on him if you have to, but keep the covers tight."

The cobra's half-length was reared from the floor, the head moving along the edge of the bed like the hand and arm of a black woman, smoothing the covers. Still higher she rose, then slid to her old place on top of the canvas bed-cover. Beaumont had closed his camera, his glance moving from the upheaval in the center of the bunk to the hooded head which watched for an exposed eye or limb, or bit of fur. Now Beaumont laid the camera down, making a definite and distracting sound. He picked up the camera tripod which lay on the floor, unused as yet. With the three steel-shod points, he poked at the snake.

The cobra turned to meet him. Her head vanished in a strike too quick for eye to follow, but like the blow of a hammer Beaumont felt the mailed head against the wood of the tripod legs. At the instant of recoil the metal points of two of the legs caught her mid-thickness. She was pinned against the under pad of the bunk, her tail whipping with electric speed and power. It struck Beaumont's knee, bruising like metal, yet with the lightness and litheness of a thong.

The cobra's length from the point where she was impaled was too short for the fangs to reach Beaumont's flesh, but it was like holding down a wild boar to keep the tripod points tight to the pad.

"Let Makin's go now. Get clear yourself!" he shouted to Blount.

The dog popped out, Blount after him. A laugh came from Beaumont. With all his strength he braced to keep the cobra down—his eyes starting from the strain of just holding her.

"I can't keep her—she's too much for me," he gasped. Strength was going out of him.

Next instant the cobra had actually freed herself. Then there was a crash in Blount's hand. He had connected with his automatic and fired at close range. But as before, the hooded head vanished at the shot, to reappear again unscathed.

A queer laugh from Beaumont. He was looking after the vanished cobra. She had made no attempt to attack either man, simply disappeared into the passageway with a speed almost too fast for the eye to follow.

Beaumont dropped down on the foot of the bunk, still laughing a bit weakly. Blount was over him, feeling his arms, opening his shirt.

"No, she didn't touch me," Beaumont smiled. "She struck the tripod twice, then I pinned her, as she pulled back. It was the force of her that got me so. You'd never believe it, man—she's tough as seasoned ash!"

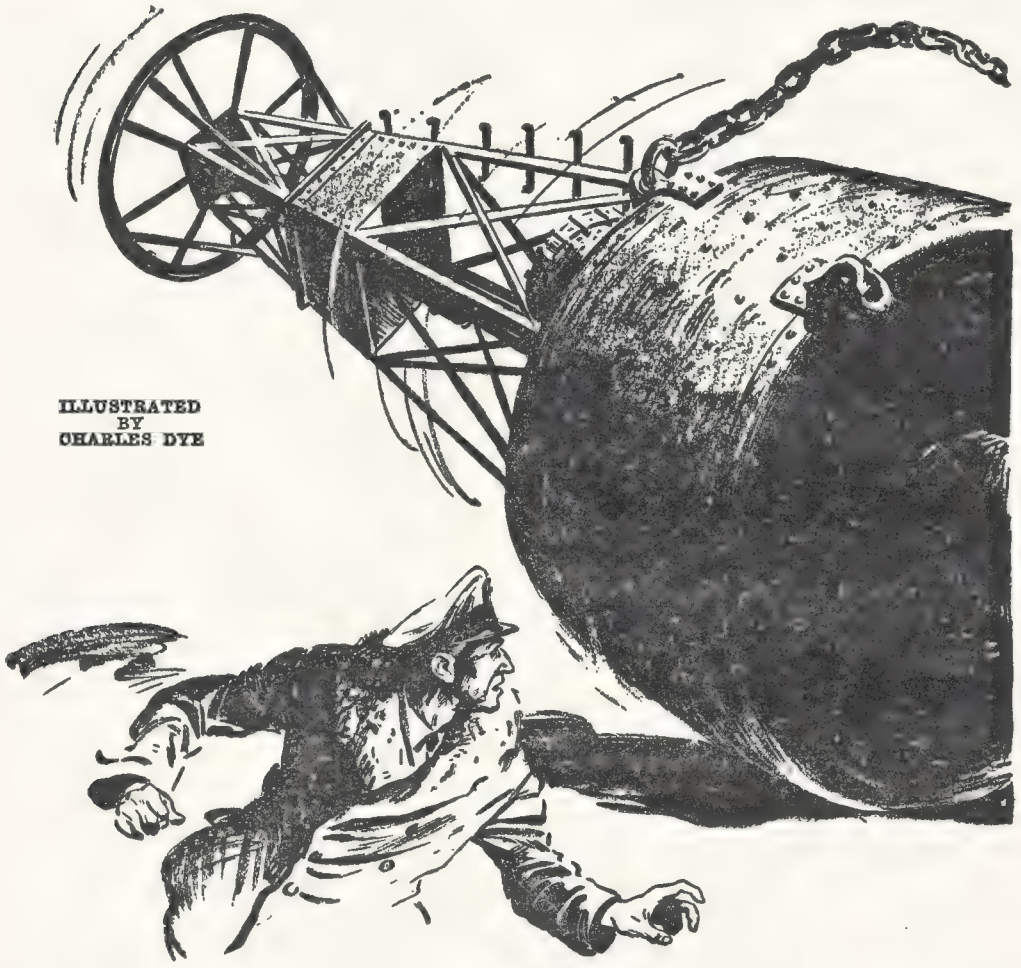
Blount continued his examinations, wishing to make sure.

"No, she didn't touch me with her head—that's a welt from her tail. It was the strength of her that did me in."

"You know," said Blount queerly, "I don't think she'd have tried to attack if we'd left her alone. I learned something in that moment we spent looking each other in the eye. She could have struck me, but she never moved. You know, I can almost believe those tales the natives tell now—about cobras discriminating between friendly and enemy humans. I'm glad she got away, and from now on, *pax* is the password between me and these puff-worms."

THUNDERING

By JOHN SCOTT



ILLUSTRATED BY CHARLES DYE

"THE Cape Deliverance buoy is adrift," Captain Grayson said, and went on reading the flimsy the radioman had handed him.

I felt slightly ill. Our lighthouse tender had just returned to Juneau after waiting for six weeks for the fall storms to abate long enough to take the Cape Esperance whistling buoy aboard for repairs. The first and second mates finally risked their lives taking turns repairing the buoy while it bobbed wildly in the seas, and as a result of exposure had just gone to the hospital.

Now, most likely, we'd be returning to the Gulf of Alaska for another bout with the storms. A troopship, destroyer or cutter striking the runaway at full speed might be sunk or badly damaged.

I stared moodily from the wheelhouse windows at swirling gray rain flurries swept across the work deck by a piping wind, and with resentment at the big whistler dogged down on the starboard side. It was the buoy we'd expected to exchange for the one at Cape Esperance.

Thinking of the sick mates gave me a ray of hope.

I wondered whether we could search for a missing buoy with no other deck officers than the captain and a third mate.

JUGGERNAUT

DOUGLAS

Intent on what he was doing, Ben failed to notice the ship starting a starboard roll. "Get clear, Mr. Freeman!" Captain Grayson screamed.

I looked at Captain Grayson, hoping for a clue.

He was a big-boned man, whose angular face was weathered to a coppery hue. He had the acquiline nose of an Indian chieftain and carried himself with the same proud and chilling dignity.

Only his stern blue eyes revealed any reaction —a certain bleak satisfaction. That puzzled me; lighthouse men hate nothing more than hunting drifters. But even more puzzling was Grayson's action in handing me the wireless message. I felt he was making me witness to some unusual course, but the message failed to confirm this suspicion. All it said was—

CAPE DELIVERANCE BUOY REPORTED MISSING. INSTITUTE SEARCH. REPLACE YOUR SICK MATES FROM TAMARACK. IF MISSING BUOY CAN'T BE FOUND SET BUOY YOU HAVE ABOARD AT CAPE DELIVERANCE.
COMMANDER NYSON

"Find the *Tamarack* and ask Mr. Freeman to report immediately," the skipper said. "We can manage with two mates."

I was stunned. Sending a third mate on such an errand was as unusual as the order. I was certain Nyson didn't intend us to remove Chief Boatswain Ben Freeman from the small tender

he commanded. Ben had served with us for years but finally he had requested a transfer because Grayson made life hell for him. Now it looked as if the skipper were striking back. So many things could go wrong when you hunted a drifting buoy. And Ben, who would be acting as our first mate, would be held responsible.

Josiah Grayson was known as a "hard captain," but I'd always thought him fair except in his treatment of his own son and Ben. Recalling Ben to the *Birch* looked to me like a low blow. It made me so mad that my eyes went out of focus and I wanted to tell the skipper what I thought about it. I knew the prize at stake: Grayson wanted to command a new lighthouse tender being built, but Ben was likely to be made her skipper.

I buttoned my lip just in time—anything I might say would only make matters worse for Ben—and stepped out into the needling wind. The *Tamarack* wasn't visible from the dock, but she was small enough to hide behind a good-sized motor boat. I questioned a dozen men before finding one who had seen her moored downchannel.

STRIDING southward, I thought of my first days on the *Birch*, when Gifford Grayson was second mate. Shipmates said he'd once been known as "Slap-Happy" because of his genial disposition, but Captain Grayson was so severe with his only son that Giff had a set, strained expression when I first knew him, and his eyes were never happy. His work of recharging automatic lights required trips in the whaleboat through vicious seas, and landings where the combers crashed and boomed in fans of spray.

He was the best rough-water mate I ever saw, but he never received a kind word from his father. If anything went wrong the skipper delivered stinging rebukes in his cabin. We heard their voices raised in anger; afterward, when Giff appeared on the bridge, his face would be white and twitching. Eventually his daring cost him his life when a whaleboat capsized while he was removing a sick keeper from a Bering Sea lighthouse. Giff gave his lifejacket to a seaman who had lost his own, and tried to reach the rocks. But the line thrown him by a keeper fell short; he waved once, and was gone.

For days the Old Man brooded in his cabin, leaving command to the first mate. When Grayson returned to duty, he began mistreating Ben Freeman, now serving as second mate, as he had his son. Nothing you could exactly put your finger on, except the skipper's dubbing Ben with the nickname, "Freshwater." Ben once served on the Great Lakes, and some salt-water men who don't know how rough the lakes can become, think of that as soft seamanship. Ben corrected the Old Man politely, but it never did any good.

If the stern anchor dragged, allowing the whaleboat to smash against the rocks, or if we scraped off paint working through a barnacle-incrusted reef, Grayson asked drily, "Was there a riffle, Mr. Freshwater?"

These rebukes made Ben more careful, but calling him "Freshwater" got under his hull. Thinking at first that Grayson was bitter over the loss of his son, Ben endured the sarcasm for a while. But when the skipper bore down on cruise after cruise, practically demanding perfection in every detail of the work, Ben requested a transfer. So capable had he become that he soon commanded the *Tamarack*.

She was tied up to a small-boat float, and I descended a ramp to board her. I explained to a seaman that I was Jim Wright, and he went aft to find Freeman.

As I waited, I thought of how much I owed Ben. He'd taught me most of the seamanship and navigation I knew. But for that matter, he'd been like a big brother to every man in the crew. When the seas were heavy, he took the first line ashore, scrambling over slimy, seaweed-covered rocks like a seal. And when younger seamen were about to give out while carrying 140-pound acetylene tanks up high cliffs to an automatic light, Ben often relieved them of their loads, sparing their feelings by saying, "Let me shoulder that; I'm getting soft."

He'd always been a big fellow, not handsome exactly—his features were too rough-cast for that—but with a disconcertingly frank glance and a manner you trusted. Now when he appeared from below, there was little outward change. His handclasp was firm and his friendly, "Good to see you, Jim," was warming. But command had given him an indefinable air of confidence and authority.

I showed him the wireless, and told him what Grayson had decided. Except for the tightening of his wide mouth, he showed no emotion.

"The Old Man must be rather up against it. Two sick mates—a drifting buoy to locate."

"But he could have taken *your* mate!"

"Jenner would be bowled over trying to locate that buoy from drift and current charts" Ben pointed out. "He's never hunted a drifter."

That stopped me momentarily, for the mathematics would have given *me* bad moments and I'd been a mate longer than Jenner. But still, Captain Grayson could have worked out the buoy's approximate position, if necessary.

"You were always so damned trusting, Ben," I said with exasperation.

"How do you mean?"

"Why, giving Grayson credit for innocent motives after the way he rode you. My hunch is he's trying to scuttle your chances of commanding the *Willow*."

"You mean the new lighthouse tender being built in Seattle?" His eyes brightened. "She's

going to be a lighthouse man's dream, Jim. Double hull, newest type of winches and other gear."

"Yes, and she's the only reason I can see why Grayson has postponed his retirement for two years. It would climax his thirty years in lighthouse work to command her. The choice of a skipper lies between you and Grayson."

"I thought Captain Nelson might be the man," Ben said.

I admitted the *Hemlock's* skipper was a third possibility.

Ben smiled ruefully. "Maybe you're right, Jim. It would queer my chances if Grayson gave me a bad report on this buoy job."

"I don't think he's ever forgiven you for requesting a transfer."

His eyes shadowed, then he said abruptly, "Wait a minute. I'll pack my gear and go along with you."

"After what I've told you?"

"You forget"—he grinned wryly—"that Grayson was recently commissioned a lieutenant, while I'm still a chief bosun."

I hadn't forgotten, but I thought Ben might know some way of getting around that point. Now I saw there wasn't any escape. Ben might radio the commander, but surprised though Nyson might be at Grayson's action, he would feel it necessary to back his decision.

BEN'S first words on entering the wheelhouse were, "My name is Freeman, sir," as though he were a complete stranger. Nothing pugnacious about the way he said it, but his eyes had a steely glint as he looked at the skipper. It was a warning that he wouldn't tolerate being called "Freshwater" again.

Remember, the cards weren't all stacked against Ben. He might get a bad report if faulty calculations failed to locate the drifting buoy, but in that case the captain would also be blamed for failure.

Grayson saw this. Though his eyes kindled, his coppery face retained its composure. "I'm aware of that," he said drily.

Ben was already working at the chart table when we shoved off. I felt sorry for him, for he had almost no concrete data to start on. I guessed the search would begin near Sitka, where the buoy had broken loose.

A whistling buoy is anchored by heavy chain to a 7,000-pound cement anchor, known as a "sinker." At extreme high tide, the chain will be stretched to its utmost, and if heavy seas coincide with flood tide, one big wave may break a weak link and the buoy will start wandering. How fast it drifts depends upon the rate of currents in those waters, weather conditions, even the length of chain still secured to it. Mariners report free buoys and the hour they are sighted, and two reports from two different ships give a fair idea of the rate of drift. But Ben had not a single report to go on.

As luck would have it, however, we received two reports from the commander's office before entering the gulf. The first said that a cutter's commander had positively seen the buoy at Cape Deliverance at flood tide three days before. The second stated that a small freighter had sighted a buoy drifting southwest of the 138th and 58th intersection, only three hours previously.

"The cutter must have sighted the buoy just before it broke loose," Ben guessed, and made some quick calculations. "It's drifting at the normal rate of forty miles a day."

Ben knew, of course, that the drift along the upper Gulf of Alaska was northwesterly, con-

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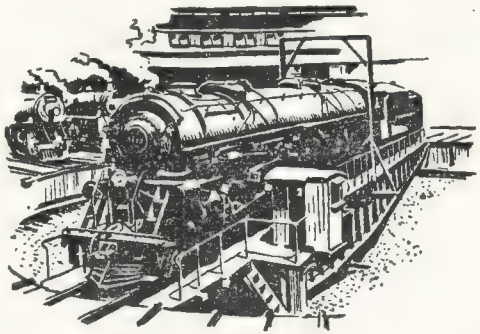

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trary to what you might expect. After consulting past logs to refresh his memory of other searches, studying several charts, and covering two pages with figures, he wrote a position on a sheet and handed it to the skipper.

"I think we can intercept it about here at 2 A. M. tomorrow, sir."

"You'd stake your reputation on that, Mr. Freeman?"

His color mounting, Ben returned to the chart table to recheck, and finally said, "I believe the buoy will be near this point, sir."

The Old Man grunted doubtfully.

Apparently that doubt disturbed Ben, for he stationed men on all points of the ship at ten the next morning. All binoculars aboard were pressed into service. Lookouts seemed to be shriveled into their sou'westers and oilskins, for the wind was bitter. We stood one-hour watches, and then, blue with cold, walked stiffly below to the galley for mugs of coffee which we drank standing over the hot fiddley grating in the engine room.

We zigged back and forth across the buoy's supposed line of drift all that day, and lay to that night. The tender rolled and pitched, and the wind rose like high flute notes. I clung to the mattress to avoid being hurled from my bunk, and hour after endless hour that shrill wailing continued until it seemed to be playing on my nerve ends.

Many men were sick during the night, and there was hardly a smile as lookouts resumed their stations. Across those gray and empty seas the wind swept the rain in fierce, smoking clouds, limiting vision to a few hundred yards. But there was no sign of a drifting buoy, nor could we have heard its mournful whistle above the wind. Each hour's delay in finding it increased the chance that a ship might blunder into it. Twice we broke radio silence to inquire of passing vessels if a buoy had been sighted, but it had not been.

By the end of the third day of searching tempers were short, but the tension was most noticeable in the wheelhouse. The skipper repeatedly lighted his pipe and then forgot to smoke. Ben labored at the chart table, checking and rechecking his figures.

Somehow the skipper got the idea that despite our constant zigzagging, we had passed the buoy, and he was half convinced we should turn back. But doing so would relieve Ben of responsibility, and the Old Man wasn't sure enough to do that. Instead he began nagging Ben, questioning his judgment, dropping sarcastic remarks about his figures. Some old men get testy when upset, but Grayson had never before been petty. By the fourth day there was the beginning of a civil war on the bridge; it was held within bounds only by the quartermaster's presence.

"How much farther have we outdistanced the buoy, Mr. Freeman?"

"I still believe it's ahead, sir."

A short time later the skipper would ask, "About here, Mr. Freeman?"

Ben's face would grow taut. "Perhaps a little farther west."

"You trust your figures, Mr. Freeman?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good someone does!"

The day wore on, with the skipper growing more vitriolic and Ben, perhaps suspecting that the Old Man was trying to force him into an open outbreak, holding his temper only by a supreme effort. And cutting at both men was the knowledge that their failure to find the buoy might result in a lost ship.

A STORM swooped down from the Cugaches as we sat at mess, and even the table-rails couldn't keep the chow moored. When the captain's plate did a complete flip-flop, he rose with stiff dignity and stalked out. A minute later the heavy seas smashed in the galley porthole, and everyone left the table to secure steel shutters over the ports.

The ship was turning into the gale when I went topside to start my watch. When I turned in, hours later, I could not stay in my bunk even by gripping the mattress. Flung to the decking about an hour after sacking in, I groped angrily for the bed-rail, and then froze as I heard a crash and felt the ship shudder violently. My first thought was that we had collided with another ship, but a second ringing clang dispelled that notion. The ship shivered and creaked, then shook again from a third impact.

Into my sleep-drugged mind came another thought: *We've struck the drifting buoy!*

As I scrambled into pants and peajacket, I heard shouts and feet pounding past my cabin. The tender trembled under two more heavy impacts. Each time there was that sharp ringing of metal, and in between the vibrant clashes, a rumbling, thundering sound, like empty boxcars crossing a trestle.

Then I was out on deck and running forward.

The wheelhouse searchlight slanted toward the work deck, and when I reached the forward rail, I saw that all my guesses as to the nature of the disaster were wrong.

The searchlight's white glare revealed a scene of terrifying confusion. Half-dressed seamen crouched in the entrance of the foc'sle, watching with dilated eyes the approach of an eleven-ton juggernaut of destruction rolling toward them. The big whistling buoy on deck had broken its steel shackles!

Our bow plunged into a phosphorescent hill of water, and the forward tilt of the deck allowed the buoy to roll forward with what seemed streamliner speed. The nearest seamen instinctively leaped back, toppling over men behind them. They lay sprawled in a tangle of

bodies when the steel monster crashed into the foc'sle head bulkheads, twisting them inward, but not sufficiently so that the buoy could injure anyone.

However, remembering another experience with a buoy which broke loose when I was a coxswain, I thought it would be a miracle if some of those seamen weren't injured or killed before we had shackled that giant.

The ship turned sluggishly into the wind. The captain was trying to control the buoy's rolling long enough for men to bend lines through its lifting-ring or superstructure to bring it under control.

Already Ben Freeman and two seamen were advancing along the port side with lines, while the winchman, a few feet away from me on the main deck, adjusted his levers, preparatory to lowering the cargo boom and slacking away the cable and hook used in handling buoys.

As the bow rose, the buoy broke away from the dented foc'sle head plates and started rolling back. But the ship, responding at last to her screws, canted port, and the base of the buoy swung around. Then it responded to the port roll.

Ben and the seaman, Satterly, dropped their lines and ran aft. But the other seaman, O'Brien, a red-headed giant who was always willing but not too fast on his feet, wore rubber boots. He slipped and fell in the scupper as the buoy thundered down upon him. Then I lost sight of him as the seas crashed over the port side. Icicles froze along my spine and my stomach constricted. I stared into that confused blur of water but when the buoy rolled starboard in answer to the opposite cant of the ship, there was no sign of a mangled body.

My scalp tingled as the big fellow rose from the bilge swirling against the aft bulkhead. The bow had been rising, and the seething water had swept him aft, out of danger. O'Brien angrily pulled off the rubber boots and ran barefooted to retrieve his line. I clung to the rail for a moment; my knees still shook.

Then I ran up the ladder. Captain Grayson and the quartermaster were on the bridge. "Any orders?" I gasped.

"Help Mr. Freeman. I'll hold the ship steady as possible."

After the buoy had bulged out the starboard steel rail with a second battering-ram assault and started portside again, I swung down the ladder to the work deck. Ben Freeman ran up.

"We've got to organize to stop this baby before she wrecks the ship," he shouted. "Stay here on the starboard side. But duck through the door if it looks like you can't get clear."

I found a medium-sized hawser and joined the men stalking the buoy. However, it never stopped long enough for anyone to make a line fast. It seemed to be guided by a perverse spirit of evil, for no sooner would it come to rest, giving us a chance to approach, than it would leap into movement again. Seamen had to jump or be killed.

Nor could the captain hold the ship steady enough to control her rolling. The buoy not only thundered athwartships. Because of its smaller base, resembling a cannon barrel protruding from the cylindrical body of the buoy, it spun around crazily—sometimes a full turn, sometimes only a quarter turn. Men believing themselves safe in positions near the bulkheads would be forced to dive through doorways or into the foc'sle entrances.

Ben Freeman and the big seaman O'Brien were the most venturesome. Once the buoy lan-

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tern gashed O'Brien's arm, but he returned to the attack after the surgeon bandaged it. And twice Ben stepped aside a split second before the buoy was upon him.

HANDICAPPING our efforts was the swirling water. Once a wave toppled me and I followed the buoy part way across deck, but luckily caught a deck ring-bolt and scrambled clear before the buoy rolled back.

"Fine bunch of lubbers," said a dry voice at my elbow. I turned in surprise to find the captain. "Are you trying to wreck my ship?"

It was an indication of the captain's concern that he would leave the bridge in such seas, but our capable quartermaster had as much—or as little—chance of controlling our rolling and pitching as any officer. And the ship, as the captain said, was taking punishment. Already the foc'sle head bulkheads and the aft bulkheads were bent and twisted; both rails bulged out, and the plates they were secured to showed signs of parting.

The captain tried to direct our attack, but with no more success than before. The men ran forward gamely enough on order, and twice lines were slipped through the buoy's superstructure, but each time it rolled before the lines could be made fast.

Then for a second the quartermaster steadied the ship and brought the buoy to a precarious stop on the port side.

"Now's your chance!" the skipper bawled.

Ben ran forward with a hawser. He should have approached from the port side, but the buoy rested against the rail and the lifting-ring was on the opposite side. Ben slipped the rope through the ring, and almost succeeded in bending a knot in it. Intent on what he was doing, he failed to notice the ship starting a starboard roll.

"Get clear, Mr. Freeman!" the captain screamed. His warning came a fraction of a second too late.

Ben could take only two steps before the monster responded to the starboard heeling. The thundering din began again like the clashing of Viking shields. I winced as the juggernaut struck Ben. Not quite in full stride, he was lifted and flung nearly to the port rail.

Though bruised and breathless, he was not quite unconscious. He pushed himself a few inches up from the deck. In the glare of the searchlight I saw him sucking breath through bloody lips. His eyes were dazed. The buoy rolling down on him must have started an electrical warning in his brain, but he was not yet clear-headed enough to receive its message.

I was riveted with horror. One man uttered a cry, but it was the only sound except for the rumbling of the buoy and the turbulent voices of the wind and sea. It did not seem possible that any man could go to Ben's assistance—and live.

Nevertheless one man had stepped out onto the deck, into the path of that rolling buoy.

It was Captain Josiah Grayson! He must have started toward the spot where he thought Ben would be thrown the moment the buoy struck the mate. Now I heard the single word, "*Son!*" wrenched from his throat as he grasped Ben's arm. A chill darted down my spine.

The captain was old, but he had once been a powerful man. Now, with a strength born of his desperation, he wrenched Ben to his feet and heaved with all his might. Staggering, stumbling, Ben crashed into the aft bulkhead.

The captain started instantly toward the starboard rail, perhaps intending to throw himself overboard to avoid being crushed. But the buoy loomed above him, would be rolling him beneath its terrible weight before he could take another three steps. There was something pitiable in that age-slowed, stumbling run. My heart twisted and bumped heavily. I forgave the Old Man all his icy cantankerousness, his severity with his own son and with Ben. "Please God—" I whispered, and could say no more.

Then there was the crashing, rending sound of steel plates parting and the buoy, with a lurch that shook the ship, came to a stop. It took me a moment to grasp what had happened. The starboard hatch had finally given way, and the buoy was lodged in the hole it had torn in the deck.

The captain heard the sound and turned, then hastily staggered aft. His old legs gave way when he reached safety. He sank limply to the deck, glaring like a wounded old eagle at a seaman who attempted to help him to his feet.

It was unlikely the buoy would remain moored for long, the way the ship was plunging, so I ran forward to grasp the line Ben had reeved through the lifting-ring. Making it fast, I secured the other end through a deck ring-bolt. This done, the winchman lowered the winch hook and it was slipped through the lifting-ring as well. Promptly, he took up slack.

Another roll broke the hold of the damaged hatch and I had to jump clear. But the winch rattled and the monster was lifted from the deck, pinioned between cable and line. The crew quickly made other lines fast, until the buoy was secured like a fly in a gigantic spider's web and could safely be lowered to the deck.

It seemed like an anticlimax when we found the drifting buoy three days later on the beach below Cape St. Elias Lighthouse. We towed it to Controller Bay, to lift it aboard and dog it down in quiet water, before sailing to Cape Deliverance to set it again.

By the time we reached the Alaskan Panhandle, Captain Grayson was getting the reaction from his narrow escape; the ship's surgeon advised him to leave the ship at Ketchikan. Ben left the tender there, too, for

his first mate had brought the *Tamarack* south. So Captain Nelson commanded the *Birch* on her run to a Seattle drydock for repairs.

NOT until I returned did I learn that Ben Freeman now commanded Alaska's new lighthouse tender, the *Willow*. I went aboard after she tied up. Though Ben now wore a lieutenant's uniform, his smile was as cordial as ever and he invited me down to his cabin. Among the photographs on his bulkhead was one of Captain Grayson.

"Have you heard that the Old Man retired?" I asked. "Apparently it hit him hard when you were given the *Willow*."

Ben sobered. "It would have pleased Grayson to command her for a cruise or so, but I don't think now that he expected it." His brows knitted. "Jim, the night that buoy broke loose, did you hear the skipper call me 'Son?'"

"Probably a twisted notion that you were Giff."

He shook his head. "I *thought* he called 'Son,' but I was pretty dazed. I doubt if he was thinking of Giff—though he did think of me as a son."

I straightened on the bunk and momentarily forgot that Ben was now a lieutenant, j.g. "*You're crazy!*"

He hesitated before drawing a wallet from his pocket. "The *Birch's* yeoman showed me carbons of two messages Captain Grayson sent. I asked him to make copies."

He unfolded two yellow sheets. The first was a copy of the wireless sent just before the *Birch* sailed from Juneau to hunt the buoy, and its blunt wording left no doubt of its authorship.

TAKING CHIEF BOATSWAIN BENJAMIN FREEMAN AS FIRST MATE. WORK REQUIRES DEPENDABLE MAN.
GRAYSON

The longer message was the routine report required of captains whose ships are damaged. Briefly it described the breaking loose of the buoy and the efforts to recapture it. Ben was mentioned several times, the last time by a single line: *Credit for preventing further damage to the ship should go to Benjamin Freeman, who showed resourcefulness and courage in reeving line through buoy lifting-ring which resulted in its being brought under control.*

Nowhere did Grayson mention the part he had played in that drama.

"Why, these reports probably helped the commander decide to put you instead of Captain Nelson in command of the *Willow!*"

"I think that's what Grayson intended."

"But he hated you, Ben!"

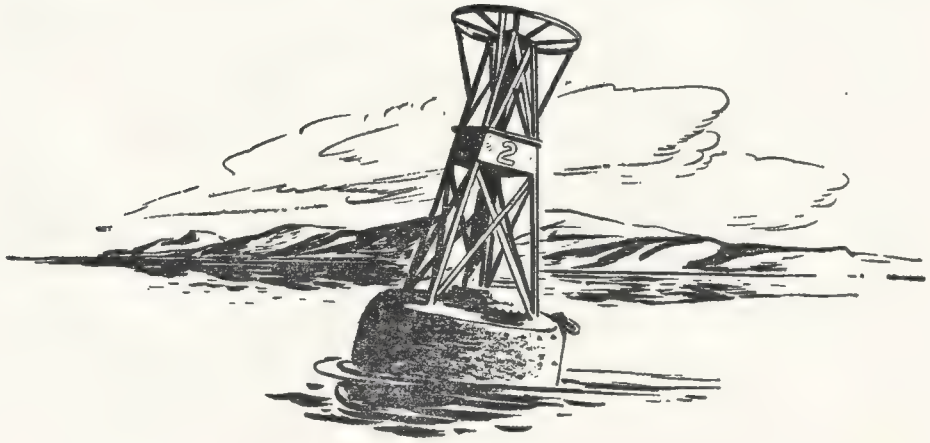
"That's where we were wrong. He was strict with me, but he never hated me. He called me 'Freshwater' when I did anything he considered lubberly. He set a standard I found it hard to meet, but the Old Man's own life was hard and he knew that the man with know-how is the one who gets ahead."

Ben must have read the doubt in my face.

"As I figure it, Jim, the Old Man had only one son. When Giff drowned, he mentally adopted me. He couldn't show his fondness for me in the ordinary way—all Grayson's emotion is bottled up. He expressed his affection for both Giff and me in the only way he knew—by giving us the benefit of all the experience he had acquired the hard way, over the years."

"He made you a good rough-water mate," I admitted. "Seen him since he retired?"

Ben grinned. "Just once, and he gave me hell. Said he didn't know what lighthouse work was coming to, with an addle-pated young idiot like me in charge of the best tender! As I left, he asked rather wistfully if I wouldn't come and see him occasionally. Perhaps he was embarrassed at softening up like that, for he added sternly, 'Then I'll have a chance to give you a piece of my mind if you don't steer a straight course.'"



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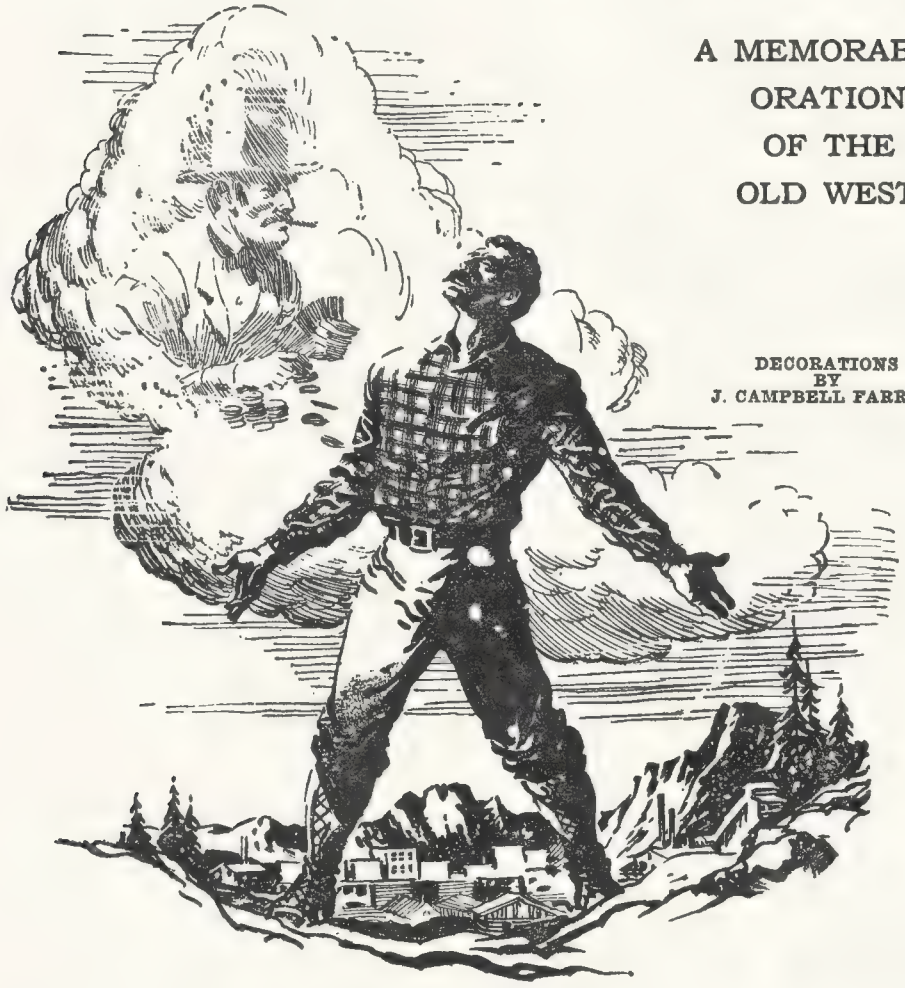


DECORATIONS BY J. CAMPBELL FARREN

By

SAM C. DUNHAM

IN THE desert mining camp of Rawhide, Nevada, in the spring of 1908, there was spoken over the body of a racetrack gambler one of the most eloquent panegyrics that has been heard in this generation. That no more highly finished and impressive eulogy had been pronounced at the bier of any man since the immortal discourse of Robert G. Ingersoll at the grave of his brother, was the opinion of the men who heard it—and there were men in that audience whose opinion was worthwhile.

The man who delivered the oration was Herman W. Knickerbocker, an itinerant minister of the gospel, prospector and mine promoter. It was spoken over the body of Riley Grannan,

whose meteoric career as a racetrack plunger furnished sensations for the newspapers for years.

The atmosphere of the occasion was unique. For an environment there was the bleak, wind-swept desert; for audience, a motley crowd of adventurers drawn from almost every clime by the lure of gold; for a theme, the life, not of a multimillionaire dying peacefully and full of honors in a Fifth Avenue mansion, but of a busted gambler, losing his last chips in a miner's shack, and the orator, not an overpaid pastor of a billion-dollar congregation, but a humble wanderer from the fold.

The rush of fifty thousand gold seekers into Rawhide in the spring of 1908 brought together as remarkable an aggregation of men as ever gathered in so short a time in any mining camp. As if by magic, there sprang up a thriving, noisy, bustling city of 12,000 inhabitants, where a few months before the only sound that broke the immemorial silence of the desert was the weird cry of the coyote, holding its night-long vigil in the barren, ghostly hills.

From the four corners of the world and its intervening spaces had come mining engineers of international reputation, young mine promoters, real estate dealers, millionaire mine operators, merchants, lawyers, journalists, preachers—representatives of every profession and calling—all lured by the irresistible magic of gold.

There were many distinct types—men of rare talent, even of genius; others that were ordinary, and some very common. On the whole, however, the camp of Rawhide, at its inception, before the advent of the riffraff of camp followers, contained as fine a body of men as ever foregathered in the West. They represented the true democracy of character which our higher civilization has so signally failed to produce in our overgrown cities. Those who live in the artificial atmosphere of a great city cannot realize how much the natural—which are the good—impulses of the race dominate individuals in all the relations of life in our Western mining camps. There the search for gold does not have the demoralizing effect that the frenzy for moneygrubbing has in the big cities. There, instead of stifling all the finer sentiments, turning men into selfish beasts, as it does in so many instances in a big town, it has the opposite effect, making them generous, big-souled, and humane. There you find all the sterling qualities playing forcefully all the time—divine charity, the greatest thing in the world, and all the good things that grow out of it.

Among the first to be attracted to the camp was Herman W. Knickerbocker. Mr. Knickerbocker was born in Louisiana, the son of an eminent jurist. At the age of twenty-one he was ordained a Methodist minister, and became the pastor of a fashionable congregation in New Orleans. He was soon called to the Trinity M. E. Church in Los Angeles, where he earned a reputation as one of the most eloquent pulpit orators on the Pacific coast. His broad and liberal views proved unacceptable to the leaders of the church, however, and he was tried for heresy, but was acquitted. He then resigned.

Having marked dramatic talent, Mr. Knickerbocker decided to adopt the stage as a profession. With this end in view he went to Tonopah, in the spring of 1903, and there erected the Tonopah Opera House. This enterprise was in advance for the demand for dramatic entertainment, however, and the opera house reverted to the Tonopah Lumber Company, sharing the fate of many other too ambitious structures in that camp.

Mr. Knickerbocker then went to work as a common miner and laborer underground in the Tonopah mines, for four dollars a day, to support his wife and four children.

DURING his stay in Tonopah, Mr. Knickerbocker occasionally gave evidence that he was obsessed with a deep-seated and well nigh overpowering melancholy. He had a lovable, childlike disposition which endeared him to all who knew him. He was usually cheerful, even optimistic, but at times it required all his fortitude to evercome this tendency to melancholy. On one occasion, while he was trying to raise money to do the location work on his Goldfield claims, he went to Diamondfield Jack Davis, the most picturesque and one of the most generous characters in camp, and offered to sell him a Colt .45 for a few dollars.

"Jack, I don't know whether to sell this gun or to blow my brains out with it," Mr. Knickerbocker said.

Jack, who only a few years before had been sentenced to hang for the alleged killing of a sheepherder up in Idaho, but had been pardoned, replied, "Knick, old boy, you mustn't talk that way. Guns are made to blow the other feller's brains out. You just let me take care o' your'n till you feel better, and here's fifty dollars to cheer you up a bit. An' don't never talk to me again about using a gun on the wrong man!"

When the first news of the great gold strike at Goldfield was brought to Tonopah, Mr. Knickerbocker joined the rush to the new district and located several claims. To provide money to do the location work required by law to hold his claims, he gave a series of Shakespearian readings in Goldfield and Tonopah, which were both financially and artistically successful. In these readings his characterizations of Macbeth, and of two or three other characters, showed that he possessed dramatic powers that would have assured him a successful career in the legitimate drama.

Within two years, Mr. Knickerbocker made

his clean-up and left Goldfield with a fortune of about $300,000. For a year he was lost sight of by the people of the camp; but somewhere he must have been an active factor in financial affairs, for at the end of that time he returned to Goldfield, broke.

He was among the first to join the stampede to the new camp of Seven Troughs, in northern Nevada, and was the first to make a big clean-up there.

Half a year later, when news of the Rawhide discoveries was brought to Reno, Mr. Knickerbocker was found in the thick of things once more.

Still later, when the camp was at the height of its boom, came Riley Grannan, the famous racetrack plunger, who opened a gambling house that for a time was the most popular resort in the camp. Here some of the biggest stakes ever wagered in the West passed over the tables.

Mr. Grannan, who had made and lost several fortunes on the turf, was dead broke when he reached Reno on his way to Rawhide. He had spent the winter in San Francisco. When the newspapers began to print the sensational news sent out from Rawhide by the press agents, he saw in these despatches the name of Nat C. Goodwin, who was the leading operator in the camp.

He learned that George Graham Rice was then in Reno with the mine promoting firm of Nat C. Goodwin & Co. Having known both men in his racetrack days, he decided to go to Reno and ask them to stake him to open a gambling house in Rawhide.

It is a very common thing in the West for men to stake one another to go into busines, particularly when the man asking for a stake has been successful in his line of endeavor. The Tonopah Club at Tonopah had made millions for George Wingfield and his partners. The Northern at Goldfield had made big fortunes for Tex Rickard and his associates. What more natural than to believe that a gambling house in Rawhide, managed by so well-advertised a character as Riley Grannan, would become the most profitable enterprise of its kind in the camp and made a fortune for its owner? It did not take Mr. Grannan long to convince Mr. Goodwin and Mr. Rice that it was good business to stake him, and that it was more than likely that he would repay them handsomely.

They supplied him with $20,000, taking his notes without interest, for the amount. First, however, they tried to dissuade him from going to Rawhide. He was just recovering from a long illness and was feeble. They feared he could not stand the rigors of the climate. He said he could stand any climate "this side of hell." He offered them an interest in the business. They refused to accept it. Their only condition was, "Return the money when you can."

The enterprise was not a financial success. From the start, Mr. Grannan played in bad luck. His resort was jammed with players day and night, but he was a steady loser.

ONE cold, stormy night, unheedful of the warnings of friends, Mr. Grannan walked out of his gambling house, after a six-hour sitting at poker, and took in the town without wearing an overcoat. As a result of the exposure, he fell an easy victim to the prevailing scourge, pneumonia.

When news of Mr. Grannan's illness reached Reno late the next night, Mr. Rice rushed a noted physician across the desert, one hundred and fifty miles to Rawhide, in an automobile, at the cost of five hundred dollars. But the physician's efforts were unavailing. Riley cashed in.

Mr. Goodwin and Mr. Rice defrayed the expenses of Riley's illness and funeral, and sent his body to the old home in Kentucky for interment. The bill was eighteen hundred dollars. But no word of their unostentatious generosity in his instance, as in many others that might be cited, was ever given to the press, although they had their grip on the press agenting of the camp. When the final curtain fell on Riley Grannan's Rawhide drama, his angels had expended about $22,000 on the disastrous venture..

Whenever a miner died in Rawhide, Mr. Knickerbocker officiated at the funeral. The ceremonies on these occasions, although of the simplest character, were always rendered impressive by his heart-stirring words. Therefore, no one in Rawhide was surprised when it was announced that Mr. Knickerbocker would perform the rites over the departed racetrack plunger.

Indeed, it was most fitting that Herman W. Knickerbocker should say the last words at the bier of Riley Grannan. The two men, born and reared under such different circumstances and following callings so widely divergent, were yet strangely akin in temperament and experience.

Mr. Knickerbocker was nurtured in luxury and educated for the higher walks of life. He had been the brilliant pastor of two fashionable congregations. But he had fallen by the wayside, had risen and had fallen again.

Mr. Grannan was born of poor parents. He began life as bell boy in a Louisville hotel. He was drawn to the racetrack by listening to the talk of horsemen when they gathered in Louisville twice a year to attend the races. His career on the racetrack was meteoric. But poverty and hardship were nothing new to him.

There was much in common between the two men. Both were generous to a fault. Many stories are told of Mr. Knickerbocker's open-handed generosity to the needy while he lived in Tonopah and Goldfield. It is a tradition of the racetracks that no one ever applied to Mr. Grannan for aid and was turned away. After Mr. Knickerbocker left the ministry and made his fortune in Goldfield, he ran the gamut of a

sporting life. There was in the nature of each a keen appreciation of the higher things of life, and neither had sunk so low as not to be able to rise again. No one could realize better than Mr. Knickerboker the heights and depths of such a nature as Mr. Grannan's.

The funeral was typical of a new mining camp. There was no hearse. The body was conveyed in an express wagon from the undertaker's tent to the improvised chapel, a variety theater at the rear of the saloon. There gathered an audience so remarkable in aspect that it probably could not be duplicated anywhere else on earth.

Men and women of every social station and grade closely commingled. A solemn hush hovered over the strange assembly. Dead silence reigned where a few hours before half drunken auditors had boisterously applauded the ribald jests and obscene songs of low-grade variety actors. But around the bier that day was gathered a throng of as sincere mourners as ever assembled at the coffinside of a departed friend.

The eulogy pronounced by Mr. Knickerboker was powerfully dramatic. His appearance was in keeping with the scene. Clad in the rough garb of a miner and wearing high boots, he looked the part of a typical pioneer. He deeply felt his subject. His eyes were dimmed with tears and at times he voice was choked by emotion.

Mr. Knickerbocker spoke without notes. A stenographic report of the oration was made by W. P. de Wolf, a well known California newspaperman, and sent to Reno the same evening without revision by Mr. Knickerbocker.

Standing on a dais beside the catafalque, with one hand lightly touching the forehead of the dead man and the other upilfted, Mr. Knickerbocker told his auditors he proposed to show the deceased to have been a dead game sport, and that he had not lived his life in vain.

He went on thus:

"I FEEL that it is incumbent upon me to state that in standing here I occupy no ministerial or prelative position. I am simply a prospector. I make no claims whatever to moral merit or to religion, except the religion of humanity, the brotherhood of man. I stand among you today simply as a man among men, feeling that I can shake hands and say 'brother' to the vilest man or woman that ever lived. If there should come to you anything of moral admonition through what I say, it comes not from any sense of moral superiority, but from the depths of my experience.

"Riley Grannan was born in Paris, Kentucky, about forty years ago. I suppose he dreamed all the dreams of boyhood. They blossomed into phenomenal success along financial lines at times during his life. I am told that from the position of a bell boy in a hotel, he rose rapidly to be a celebrity of worldwide fame. He was one of the greatest plungers, probably, that the continent has ever produced.

"He died the day before yesterday in Rawhide.

"This is a very brief statement. You have the birth and the period of the grave. Who can fill the interim? Who can speak of his hopes and fears? Who can solve the mystery of his quiet hours that only he himself knew? I cannot.

"He was born in the sunny southland—in Kentucky. He died in Rawhide.

"There is the beginning and the end. I wonder if we can see in this picture what Ingersoll said at the grave of his brother? 'Whether it be near the shore, or in mid-ocean or among the breakers, at last a wreck must mark the end of one and all.'

"He was born in the sunny southland where brooks and rivers run musically through the luxuriant land; where the magnolia grandiflora, like white stars, glow in a firmament of green; where crystal lakes dot the greensward and the softest summer breezes dimple the wave lips into kisses for the lilies on the shore; where the air is resonant with the warbled melody of a thousand sweet-voiced birds and redolent of the perfume of many flowers. This was the beginning. He died in Rawhide, where in winter the shoulders of the mountains are wrapped in garments of ice, and in summer the blistering rays of the sun beat down upon the skeleton ribs of the desert. Is this a picture of universal human life?

"Sometimes, when I consider the circumstances of human life, a curse rises to my lips and, if you will allow me, I will say here that I speak from an individual point of view. I cannot express other than my own views. If I run counter to yours, at least give me credit for a desire to be honest.

"When I see the ambitions of man defeated; when I see him struggle with mind and body in the only legitimate prayer he can make to accomplish some end; when I see his aim and purpose frustrated by a fortuitous combination of circumstances over which he has no control; when I see the outstretched hand, just about to grasp the flag of victory, take instead the emblem of defeat, I ask, what is life? What is life? Dreams, awakening, and death; 'a pendulum 'twixt a smile and a tear;' 'a momentary halt within the waste, and then the nothing we set out from;' 'a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more;' 'a tale told by an idiot; full of sound and fury, signifying nothing;' a child blown bubble that but reflects the light and shadow of its environment and is gone; a mockery, a sham, a lie, a fool's vision; its happiness but Dead Sea apples, its pain the crunching of a tyrant's heel. I feel as Omar did when he wrote:

" 'We are no other than a moving row
Of magic shadow shapes that come and go
Round with the sun illumed lantern held
In midnight by the Master of the show;
But helpless pieces of the game He plays
Upon this checkerboard of nights and days,
Hither and thither moves, and checks and slays,
And one by one back in the closet lays.
The ball no question makes of ayes and noes,
But here or there as strikes the player goes;
And He that tossed you down into the field,
He knows about it all—He knows—He knows!'

"But I don't. This is my mood.

"Not so with Riley Grannan. If I have gauged his character correctly, he accepted the circumstances surrounding him as the mystic officials to whom the universe had delegated its whole office. He seemed to accept both defeat and victory with equanimity. He was a man whose exterior was as placid and gentle as I have ever seen, and yet when we look back over his meteoric past we can readily understand, if this statement be true, that he was absolutely invincible in spirit. If you will allow me, I will use a phrase most of you are acquainted with. He was a 'dead game sport.' I say it not irreverently, but fill the phrase as full of practical human philosophy as it will hold; and I believe that when you can say one is a 'dead game sport' you have reached the climax of human philosophy.

"I believe that Riley Grannan's life fully exemplified the philosophy of these verses:

" 'It's easy enough to be happy
When life flows along like a song;
But the man worth while
Is the man who will smile
When everything goes dead wrong.'

" 'For the test of the heart is trouble,
And it always comes with the years,
And the smile that is worth
The homage of earth
Is the smile that shines through tears.'

"I know that there are those who will condemn him. There are those who believe today that he is reaping the reward of a misspent life.

"There are those who are dominated by medieval creeds. To those I have no word to say in regard to him. They are ruled by the skeleton hand of the past, and fail to see the moral beauty of a character lived outside their puritanical ideas. His goodness was not of the type that reached its highest manifestations in any ceremonial piety. His goodness, I say, was not of that type, but of the type that finds expression in the hand clasp; the type that finds expression in a word of cheer to a discouraged brother, the type that finds expression in quiet deeds of charity; the type that finds expression in friendship—the sweetest flower that blooms along the dusty highway of life; the type that finds expression in manhood.

"He lived in the world of sport. I do not mince my words. I am telling what I believe to be true. In the world of sport—hilarity sometimes, and maybe worse. He left the impress of his character on the world and through the medium of his financial power he was able with his money to brighten the lives of its inhabitants. He wasted it, so the world says. But did it ever occur to you that the most sinful men and women who live in the world are still men and women? Did it ever occur to you that the men and women who inhabit the night world are still men and women? A little happiness brought into their lives means as much to them as happiness brought into the lives of the straight and good. If you can take one ray of sunlight into their night life and thereby bring them one single hour of happiness, I believe you are a benefactor.

"Riley Grannan might have 'wasted' some of his money in this way.

"Did you ever stop to think how God does not put all his sunbeams into corn, potatoes and flour? Did you ever notice the prodigality with which he scatters these sunbeams over the universe?

"Contemplate: God flings the Auroral beauties around the cold shoulders of the North; hangs the quivering picture of the mirage above the palpitating heart of the desert; scatters the sunbeams like gold upon the bosoms of myriad lakes that gem the verdant robe of nature; spangles the canopy of night with star-jewels and silvers the world with the reflected beams from Cynthia's mellow face; hangs the gorgeous crimson current of the Occident across the sleeping room of the sun; wakes the coy maid of dawn to step timidly from her boudoir of darkness to climb the steps of the Orient and fling wide open the gates of the morning. Then tripping over the landscape, kissing the flowers in her flight, she wakes the birds to herald with their music the coming of her King, who floods the world with refulgent gold. Wasted sunbeams, these? I say to you that the man who by the use of his money or power is able to smooth one wrinkle from the brow of care, is able to change one moan or sob into a song, is able to wipe away one tear and in its place put a jewel of joy—this man is a public benefactor. I believe that some of Riley Grannan's money was 'wasted' in this way.

"WE stand at last in the presence of the Great Mystery. I know nothing about it, nor do you. We may have our hopes, but no knowledge. I do not know whether there be a future life or not. I do not say there is not. I simply say I do not know. I have watched the wicket gate close behind many and many a pilgrim. No word has come back to me. The gate is closed. Across the chasm is the gloomy cloud of death. I say I do not know. And if you will allow this expression, I do not know whether it is best that my dust or his at last

should go to food the roots of the grasses, the sagebrush or the flowers, to be blown in protean forms by the low of the persistence of personal identity beyond what we call death. If this be all, 'after life's fitful fever, he sleeps well . . . nothing can harm him further.' God knows what is best.

"This may be infidelity; but if it is, I should like to know what faith means. I came into this universe without my volition—came and found a loving mother's arms to receive me. I had nothing to do with the preparation for my reception here. I have no power to change the environment of the future; but the same power which prepared the loving arms of a mother to receive me here will make proper reception for me there.

"God knows better than I what is good for me, and I leave it with God.

"If I had the power today by the simple turning of my hand to endow myself with personal immortality, in my finite ignorance I would refuse to turn my hand. God knows best. It may be that there is a future life. I know that sometimes I get very tired of this life. Hedged and cribbed, caged like a bird caught from the its wings against the bars only to fall back in wilds that in its mad desire for freedom beats defeat upon the floor, I long for death, if it will but break the bars that hold me captive.

"I was snowbound in the mountains once for three days. On account of the snow we had to remain immediately alongside the train. After three days of this, when our food had been exhausted, the whistle blew that meant the starting of the train out into the world again. It may be that death is but the signal whistle that marks the movement of the train out into the broader and freer stretches of spiritual being. As we stand in the presence of death we have no knowledge, but always, no matter how dark the gloomy clouds hang before me, there gleams the star of hope. Let us hope, then, that it may be the morning star of eternal day.

"It is dawning somewhere all the time. Did you ever pause to think that this old world of ours is constantly swinging into the dawn? Down the grooves of time, flung by the hand of God, with every revolution it is dawning somewhere all the time. Let this be an illustration of our hope. Let us believe, then that in the development of its destiny, it is constantly swinging nearer and nearer to the sun.

"And now the time has come to say good-by. The word farewell is the saddest in our language. And yet there are sentiments sometimes that refuse to be confined in that world. I will say: Good-by, old man! We will try to exemplify the spirit manifested in your life in bearing the grief at our parting. Words fail me here. Let these flowers, Riley, with their petaled lips and perfumed breath, speak in beauty and fragrance the sentiments that are too tender for words. Good-by!"

THERE was not a dry eye in the audience when Mr. Knickerbocker finished his masterly discourse. Some of those present, indeed, acted as if spellbound. Surprise at the remarkable performance of the orator was depicted on the countenances of the thoughtful among the hearers.

The coffin was carried to a motor truck, which was to convey it to the railroad. Silently, the pallbearers, selected from the most prominent residents of the camp, took their places behind the improvised hearse. Then the funeral cortege, embracing nearly every man and woman in Rawhide, slowly wound its way down the canyon, beneath a wintry desert sky.

At the foot of the canyon the procession halted and dispersed, while the motor truck proceeded across the desert to the railroad station, thirty miles away, whence the body of Riley Grannan was transported to the old home in Kentucky, to be laid to rest "where the magnolia grandiflora, like white stars, glow in a firmament of green; where crystal lakes dot the greensward and the softest summer breezes dimple the wave lips into kisses for the lilies on the shore; where the air is resonant with the warbled melody of a thousand sweet-voiced birds and redolent of the perfume of many flowers."

CAPTAINS DON'T CRY

A Tale of the Grand Banks

By EDMUND GILLIGAN

ILLUSTRATED BY GORDON GRANT

THE STORY THUS FAR:

CAPTAIN DAN HARDEGON brings the *Moon Hawk* home to Gloucester with her catch—he has skippered the dragger for one voyage to the fishing banks while her regular captain recovers from an accident —to find himself in the middle of a tense situation.

The *Golden Hind*, last topsail schooner out of Gloucester to fish by hand from dories, returns after an unlucky voyage with an almost empty hold. Her captain, JACK ROADES, reports to the owner of the *Hind*, NORA DOONAN, whom he expects to marry, that one of his crew, JAMES CORKERY, has drowned on the Banks. The dead man's brother JOHN, also of the *Hind's* crew, blames the death on Roades, curses captain and ship and refuses to sail aboard her again. Hardegon, who ill conceals his own love for Nora, tries to persuade her to convert the *Hind* to power but she and Roades rebuff him and refuse his gift of a large-mesh manila net he has woven. Hardegon tries to tell them that such men as PARRAN, who skippers the big dragger *Doubloon* for a Boston firm, are ruining the fishing grounds with their small-mesh nets, but Nora won't heed him because she owes Parran money and must borrow more from him if her schooner is to make even one more voyage. She knows also that Roades wants her to sell the *Hind* to Parran.

However, Nora has an ace up her sleeve in the rotting hulk of the old *Western Star* which lies in Shelburne, Nova Scotia. There is a fortune in lead in her keel which the government needs and Nora determines to get it by hook or crook to pull herself out of the red. She enlists the aid of AMBROSE CAMERON and four other old dorymen who love the *Hind* and served aboard her under Nora's grandfather. She tells Hardegon of her plan and he persuades her to

keep it secret from everyone, even Roades to whom she is engaged, but particularly Parran whom he knows will stop at nothing to double-cross her.

Making ready for the voyage to Shelburne the *Hind* is berthed beside Parran's big dragger. Nora manages to borrow again from the *Doubloon's* captain but has trouble getting a crew together. John Corkery, still nursing his hate for Roades, goes after the *Hind's* skipper with a knife but Hardegon stops the fight and attempts to persuade Corkery to sail, offers to go dorymate with him if he will—a startling offer for a captain to make but Hardegon has made up his mind he must be on the *Hind* at any cost to protect Nora. Corkery seems about to change his mind and sail when Parran intrudes to make a suggestion.

He offers to take Corkery on his own vessel in exchange for one of the *Doubloon's* crew, BILLY ATKINS, who has a none too savory reputation now, after his association with Parran, though he used to be a good fisherman. Nora is reluctant to hire the man but Hardegon realizes that it will mean getting a friend aboard the *Doubloon,* for he knows that despite Corkery's hate for Roades, he is essentially loyal to Nora and the *Hind.* Hardegon says he'll go dorymate with Atkins and the man comes aboard the *Hind.*

The schooner sails for Nova Scotia and after she's left port old Ambrose Cameron and his four mates, whom Nora has hidden aboard, make their appearance. Roades is furious with Nora for her secretive attitude and tries to pump her about her plans and why she needs five extra men and an extra dory but she heeds Hardegon's warning to tell him nothing. When they dock at Shelburne, Roades thinks it is just to take on bait. He goes ashore and Nora starts out, after giving Ambrose his instructions, to beard the money-shark, BANNISTER, who doesn't realize he has a fortune in the keel of the old *Western Star.*

"He beat the *Hind* once," Nora says, "but Bannister is going to be taken today as sure as my name is Doonan!"

Part III

"I WAS here on the *Lark* three seasons ago when he cheated you out of a few thousand. The *Hind* was broke, as usual," Hardegon recalled.

"We were up his alley in that business, Dan. Putting money into beef with a skinflint was something I'd never have done, had I had my way. But Jack and Grandfather were so sure of themselves. Navy contracts!" She shook her head dismally. "But this time, the deal is in my line of business. Bannister can weigh up a steer with his eye, but he doesn't know bilge from pudding."

Hardegon nodded. "Let's hope he hasn't learned anything, Nora." Then he said, "The keel is all you want?"

"No, the whole vessel! I mean to get her out of here, spars and all. Even her old canvas. He's got it somewhere."

"All right. And let me tell you this, Nora. You know, I once thought I could do something with the *Western Star.* Long ago. He was ready to let her go for a song then. But I didn't even have the song."

"I didn't know that. But it's all the better. Let him talk about her. But watch him."

"I'll do that."

"And one thing more—don't let any man off the *Hind* until after I've gone to the town. And especially you keep your eye on Billy Atkins."

"All right!"

He looked among the dorymen and found Atkins working on the bait boxes, piled high on the wharf. Nora's concern over Atkins surprised him; for she had said nothing of her feeling that Atkins and Parran were actually working together against her.

He lifted her suitcase to the wharf. She strolled up and down the deck for a moment in a casual way, then climbed to the wharf. She took another turn in the sunshine there. Dan saw her look at the toiling men. Then she took up her bag and strode off.

Hardegon gave her time to get out of sight. He went down into the cabin and washed, broke out his own gear and found a ragged shirt and a pair of trousers. When he had dressed again, he looked a little seedy.

He climbed to the wharf and counted heads. All the men were at work. Atkins had gone down to the deck again and was chatting with Roades. Now and then he pointed to a basket of bait and said something, his queer little face twisted in lively talk. He may have been talking about the herring. Hardegon thought he wasn't. He noticed that Atkins stopped his chatter when a doryman stood near. He also saw that Roades had again changed from his natural cheerfulness to a somber moodiness. He now stared down at the deck, not at the swinging bait baskets.

Hardegon went up to the town. He walked slowly down the main street, stopping now and then to pass the time of day with a Nova Scotian skipper or with a patrol of the Irish Regiment, which was then on provost duty in Shelburne. To one of the sergeants, who used to be a fisherman on the *Bluenose,* Hardegon said, "You boys getting any good beef from Bannister lately?"

The sergeant spat.

Hardegon strolled down one of the lanes that led to the river side. He turned westward toward Bannister's stockyard, heard the squealing of shoats and the lowing of cattle beyond the sties. As he came up to the gate, he saw Bannister taking the sun on a box in front of

the shanty which served him as an office. Bannister kept blinking at the sun in a crafty manner; and, no doubt, was saying how nice it would be if he could buy it up and make a slight but uinversal charge for its use. He had a face like a doryman's fist. He was expertly attired in patches and broken boots. His right elbow stuck eloquently out of his hand-me-down jacket which was fastened in front by a rusted horse-blanket pin. You'd hardly think the poor creature had a dime to bless himself with, not to mention a hundred thousand dollars. Which was precisely the impression he labored to create.

CHAPTER VII

MISTER BANNISTER

UNTIL Hardegon hailed him, Mr. Bannister had so far forgotten his role that a look of content had brightened his face. When he heard the shout, and saw the Gloucesterman, he switched off his inner lights and began to murmur sadly in the Job vein.

"Ah, well! Ah, well!" And, "Good day, Captain, good day! Miserable day, ain't it? Come to look at an old man in the midst of ruin, eh? Well, all right! It's all right. I don't mind." He ran the back of his filthy hand across his eyes, which had at once filled with tears.

Hardegon said, "Now, now, Bannister! Don't take on so. Don't! You know what I told you last time. If things don't grow worse soon, there's a chance they may be better."

"There's more truth than poetry in that, Captain, I do admit." He blew his nose through his fingers with a sobbing noise. "You're a sound young man, a sound young man."

This was just about as far as Bannister could go without getting a bargain under way. He said, "And what can a poor old man—a very poor one—do for ye this day, Captain? Some prime quarters of beef, perhaps? Lean hams? Bacon?"

Hardegon let his head fall a little in despair. He flung his hands out in the classic gesture. "I've come down in the world, Bannister, and I make no bones about it. I'm a doryman again—"

"A doryman!" Disappointment turned Bannister's croak into a mean shriek. "A doryman, is it? May the Lord have mercy on us when His snow falls! You were skipper of a fine dragger out of Boston when last I laid eyes on ye! With a big icebox to be filled." He jumped up to take a nearer, shrewder look. He added up the signs of wretchedness in Hardegon's dress. "Drunk yourself back into a dory, eh? Drunk yourself out of twenty thousand a year, I take it?" His rage made him dance a bit. The sole of his left boot flapped miserably. "Oh, the world, the world, the drink!"

"'Tisn't exactly that way, Mr. Bannister," said Hardegon. "Talked myself back into a dory, I did. That's my story. And now—"

"Talk! Talk!" The old wretch shook his rags to the breeze and hopped frantically up and down. He had already lost imagined hundreds and was apt to lose more, if this kept on. "There's too bloody much talk along this coast!" His eyes had changed into the shape and frost-hue of a dogfish eye. He suddenly gave up in disgust, not being able to hear a jingle in Hardegon's pockets, no matter how he strained for it. He said roughly, "What do you want, young man? Out with it!"

"Well, as I said, I've come down in the world, Mr. Bannister"—Hardegon leaned ever so slightly on the new *Mr.*—"and I came in today on the *Golden Hind*—"

"The *Golden Hind!* The *Golden Hind!*" Bannister stuck his pale tongue out of the encrusted port corner and, smoothly, slowly, licked his lower lip clear across to the starboard, where the tongue reluctantly moved inboard, quite as if the lip had been smeared with honey. This was his remembrance of his cheating of the *Hind.* He drew in a good breath of air and blinked reflectively. It was so hard to tell!

"Yes," said Hardegon, "a doryman again. On the *Golden Hind.* And I need a little gear for fishing. I remembered you once had a little stuff that you took for a bad debt. I want an old gaff and a gobstick maybe. And have you any old oil clothing? We'll be oiling up on the Banks this time all right! And in Gloucester—well, Mr. Bannister, when a man's down and out in Gloucester, where is he? I ask you!"

"He's down and out! Same as here."

The dogfish look was so mean now that Captain Hardegon flushed. He thrust his hand into his pocket and said: "I can pay a little something. I'm not looking for charity."

"That's good!" Bannister began scratching the bargain point on his bristly chin. "Let me see! Let me see!" His eyes darted over his domain: barns, sheds, sties and paddocks, all ranged along his tumbledown yard. The horns of bulls and steers flashed in the sunlight. Hardegon heard the clashing of rams' horns from the sheep folds in the lane.

Hardegon looked over the Roseway River. The stranger dory from the *Hind* lay there. Even while he watched, the port oars gave a stroke or two toward the stockyard. There were only four men in it. Old Ambrose Cameron in his 'longshore togs was missing.

Bannister had little of such gear to sell to a down-and-outer. He didn't seem able to remember having the things that Hardegon mentioned. Yet he hated to let go a chance to turn a penny. He began to inch along in a crab gait and beckoned Hardegon to follow.

They passed the slaughterhouse and turned toward a wharf, where two livestock barges were tied up. Then they came to a thing that had always filled Hardegon with a sailing-

master's woe. It was a ruin, but there was grandness in it. The vessel was a schooner-yacht, a fathom longer than the *Hind*, and yacht-decked; that is, she had no wooden rail, only the vestige of a pipe-iron one. Her skylights, well-made of maple, were broken. Only a few jagged panes remained. The well-matched timbers of her deck had resisted the snow and frost for many seasons, but everything that could be broken or carried away had gone. Her stays had vanished. Even the ring-bolts were out. She had taken water, too, and lay heavy in the Roseway tide. Nevertheless, enough of her old buoyancy remained so that she leaned ever so slightly in answer to the tugging of the tide. Out of her hold came a sighing and rhythmic groaning, as if she meant to say, "Aye! There could be some sailing yet!"

Nothing—not even Bannister's ignorance and neglect—could kill her beauty and her strength. Her spars, cracked and peeled, lay along the wharf. These, too, gave off a sort of splendor, a hint of gales outworn and glorious races won.

This vessel was none other than the old contender — the never-to-be-forgotten *Western Star*. Her history was well-known to men of the sea; at least, to those who had lain under crowded sails. Her owner, in a time of 'longshore evil, had killed himself aboard her while she lay gleaming in Shelburne Harbor. Those he had left behind had let her go with a curse into the first pair of willing hands. Those hands, of course, had been Bannister's. He had been aboard with beef for her galley when the owner died. Long since, she had been forgotten.

Hardegon halted there. He laid a hand on the butt of her mighty mainmast and gave her a tender look for the sake of the days when the *Hind* had sailed against her. He remembered her with all her hamper spread under a summer moon. His eyes darkened a little. He again looked out over the river. The stranger dory had drifted half a mile nearer.

"Come along, doryman! Come along!" Bannister scratched his head busily and urged Hardegon again. Yet, seeing that he tarried above the near-ruin, he said, "Once ye thought you'd take her off my hands before she rotted away. Ain't in such funds now, be ye?"

His maneuvre brought him no response.

He murmured, "'Tis not a purchase for a poor doryman. Though cheap she is. Cheap."

Hardegon shook his head sadly. He stepped forward and looked through the torn skylights and down into her wrecked, rusted bathrooms; her bursted lockers and cabins filled with murmurs. And he looked down, down to the great and famous keel that rested in the Roseway mud. He well remembered the making of that keel and the thirty thousand pounds of pure lead that went into it. He shivered at the thought that Bannister might read his mind.

Bannister capered a bit and drew up. "Don't take on so, laddie. God send the day when ye may take her. Ye raced against her more than once when you were a boy, eh? Aye! I remember, I remember! Beautiful she was. Like a woman. A fine, strapping woman—"

Hardegon suddenly turned toward the gate. He thought he had heard the booming of a familiar voice and a familiar laughter.

AN hour before this, Nora had entered the Loyalist Tavern where she took a room on the second floor. There she flung off her doryman's rig and bathed. She took out her faded green suit, her precious pair of silk stockings, and dressed quickly. She put on a rather mannish hat of green felt and a cream-colored topcoat of camel's hair that she had borrowed from a girl at home.

This unaccustomed elegance delighted her. She ran her hands over the rich pile of the coat and looked at herself in the long mirror. "Not half bad, Doonan!" She took out a black veil, lightly marked with green dots. "And when I draw this over the Doonan features—I'll slay them, one and all!"

A knock came at her door. She tucked the bow of the veil into place and called out, "Come in!"

Ambrose Cameron opened the door. His derby lay in correct stylishness upon his curved arm. He bowed grandly at the threshold and asked in his Boston manner, "May I enter, madame?"

"You may, indeed."

He expressed his approval of her appearance by a barely perceptible rise of his eyebrows. "I congratulate you, my dear niece. Fetching!"

"And I congratulate you, my new uncle. You are polished to the nines. Shall we go?"

He bowed again. "You have the wherewithal, my dear?"

She held up a cloth handbag of green and gold. She opened it and took out a large, much-worn leather wallet. He thrust this into his pocket and gave her his arm.

They passed slowly down the street, commanding no little attention from military and civilian alike. It had been some time since Shelburne had been treated to the sight of a true Boston gentleman, a veil and suitably flashing eyes, and a pair of well-filled silk stockings, all at the same time. She clung prettily to his arm and now and then gave him a look of pride and charming dependence. He showed his pride in her, too; even greeted the more enthusiastic glances with a dignified smile and a rise of his derby. They cut a swath in the drabness.

"Never," she said demurely, "have I been squired by a handsomer man."

"My dear," said he, "I return the compliment, undeserved as it is, in my case. Were I in funds, I should most certainly invite you to a dish of ice cream in the Shelburne Candy Par-

lor. Vanilla, of course. With chocolate sauce."

"We must bear it in mind, Uncle Ambrose."

At this point, a rather burly sea captain suddenly stepped in front of Ambrose and held up his hand. The captain's genial mouth opened, then closed in hesitation.

"Sir!" exclaimed Ambrose with nary a quiver. "Sir!" He gave the captain the tenth part of a smile, touched ever so slightly with indignation.

The captain laid his fingers to the brim of his cap. "Begging your pardon, sir, but I could swear—that is—aren't you—oh! no! I beg your pardon, sir."

"No offense, my dear sir," replied Ambrose. "None at all!"

In confusion, the captain was awkwardly stepping sideways when Ambrose checked him with a lordly gesture and asked, "Can you, by any chance, direct me to Mr. Bannister's establishment?"

A look of dismay came over the captain's face. "*Mister* Bannister? *Mister!*" He scowled. "Begging your pardon, sir, but you wouldn't want to take a lady to that place. Oh, no!"

Nora paid him off with a dark shot from behind the veil.

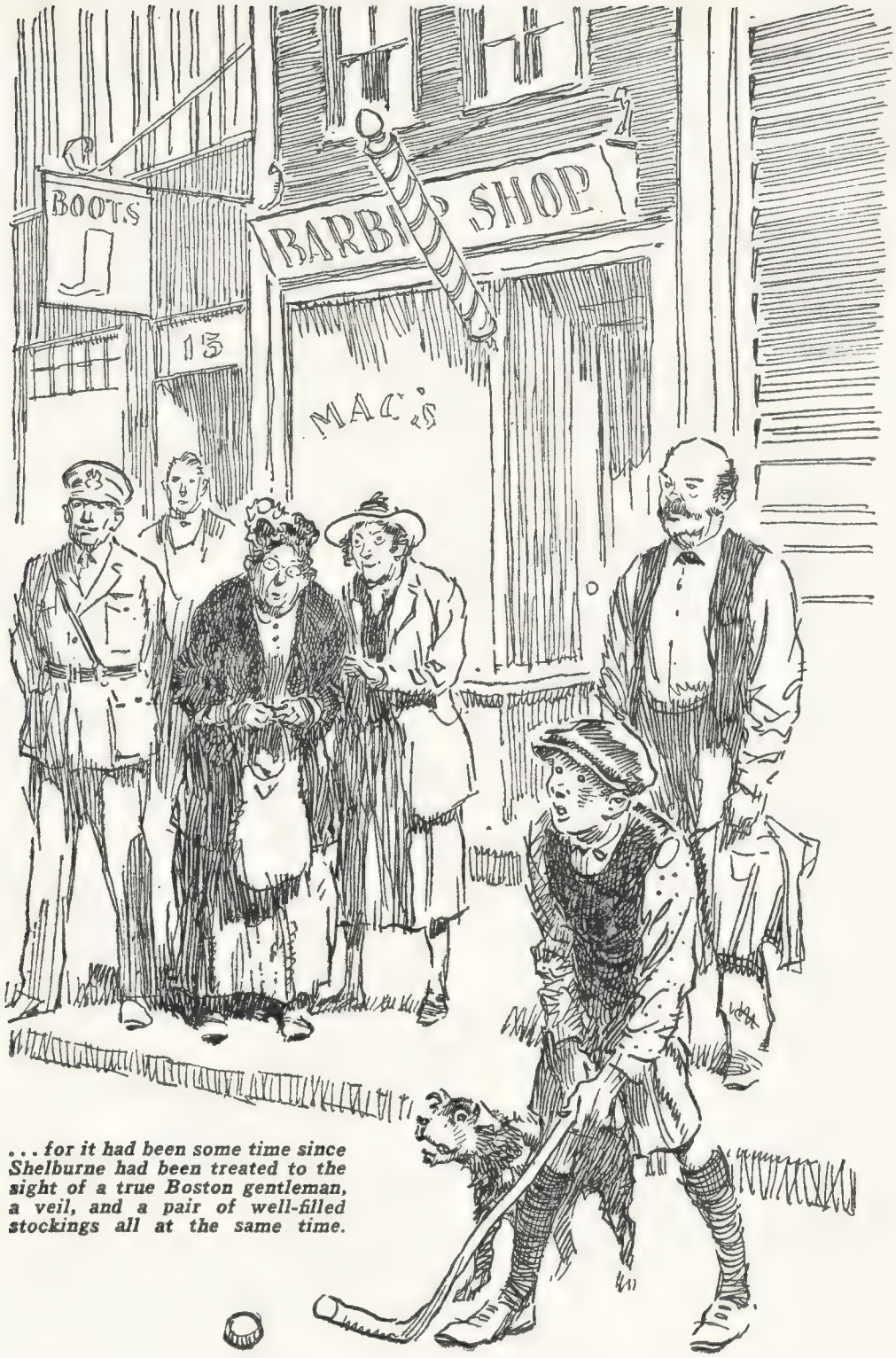
Ambrose said, "You are very kind, sir! We are quite aware of the nature of the person's circumstances. Nevertheless, we must see Mr. Bannister. A matter of sentiment, sir. Family sentiment."

The captain pointed down the lane and barged off with mystified looks backward.

"Know him?" asked Nora when they were away from him.

"Quite well, Miss Nora, once upon a time. Fooled him, just the same."

They passed slowly down the street, commanding no little attention from military and civilians alike. . . .



. . . for it had been some time since Shelburne had been treated to the sight of a true Boston gentleman, a veil, and a pair of well-filled stockings all at the same time.

"Beautifully!"

Ambrose tried to look down at his magnificent necktie. "'Twas the stickpin, my dear, that blinded him."

She tightened her hold upon his arm. "'Tis yours, Ambrose. Whether we win or lose down here, 'tis yours."

This pleased the old man. He touched the pin delicately with his gloved finger. "We'll win. Have no fear, Cap'n Nora. We've only to take our time and carry it off with finish and dash. I don't know Bannister by sight, but I know him well enough by hearsay."

The westward turn of the lane gave them a clear view of the Roseway, rippling in the late sunlight.

Nora said, "There's our dory, Ambrose." It was far away. Yet she could see his chums give a stroke or two toward the shore. The stockyard and the wharf were hidden by the roll of the land. The off-shore breeze carried up the crying of lambs.

Old Ambrose gave up his masquerade for the time being. They were alone. She still clung to his arm and walked in silence, imposed upon her by the graveness of the approaching struggle. Knowing that he, too, was deep in friendly concern for her welfare, she took the chance that he might be willing to speak of the *Hind*. He had been aboard the vessel long enough to have learned much, especially because he had the profound respect of all the Gloucestermen.

He forestalled her opening words by saying, "One thing you must promise me, Miss Nora. Even if it goes against the grain. As well it might, though I don't know all your plan."

"I promise it, Ambrose."

"Beforehand?"

"Aye, sir!"

"Why so?"

"Because of your wisdom, Ambrose, and your great friendship for the *Hind* and me."

"Then I wish to say that you must leave the *Western Star* to me and my chums, once you own her. Go home on the *Hind*, Miss Nora."

"I cannot!" She said this quickly and earnestly, even though, in the act of saying it, she remembered her violent determination not to leave the *Hind*.

"Why not?"

"I can't ask a man to do anything I wouldn't do myself. No!"

"You're not doing so. We know you would come with us. That point is settled. There's another reason for you to stay on the *Hind*." With no further preliminary, he then launched into the very subject that she had meant to bring up. He startled her by repeating her own thought. "I've been aboard the *Hind* long enough to know that something's wrong. You must stay aboard now to do your duty as her owner. It may not seem the sporting thing to do. Like sailing on the *Star* and taking your chances with us. But it's the necessary thing."

"I will do what you say."

"Your dorymen talked. Of course, they talked. Not as much as they would have talked if I had been signed on regular—I mean, for fishing."

Ambrose hesitated again. She knew that he was trying to draw a fine line between the things he could say and the things that custom and ancient habit must keep hidden.

To help him, she asked, "How much of what you heard can you repeat, Ambrose?"

"I'll give you my knowledge. Not learned in the forecastle. No! In the Gloucester *Times*. The *Lark* came in the day before the *Hind* with 60,000 pounds of groundfish. She went far for them, I hear. The *Thebaud* stocked 70,000 pounds. Came in the same day with the *Hind*. And fished the same banks. Now I know they have the jump on her. Those schooners have big engines. But the *Hind* brought nothing home to you. Please bear this in mind."

"All right, Ambrose."

"A story was told in Gloucester of the death of James Corkery," he went on. "Captain Roades gave you an account of it."

"Yes. And what about it, Ambrose?"

"These accounts differ."

"How do you know that? Dan Hardegon and I were the only ones that heard the captain's story." Her voice broke. "I didn't think Jack Roades should be cursed."

"Dan told it to me late that night. I found him looking for John Corkery."

"And who gave you the crew's account?"

"It was told to Dan and me at the Anchor Cafe by the man who was mostly at fault. The Lisbon." He added quickly, "At fault, according to your captain, for letting the Corkery dory go after the mark-buoy."

"And why does Dan Hardegon keep this from me if he thinks Jack Roades"—she paused in cold terror over thought and word—"if he thinks that Captain Roades is at fault, that something is wrong aboard the *Hind?*"

He halted and stared down at her in surprise. "You are a child with men, Cap'n Nora! Don't you know that Captain Hardegon could never speak to you on such a matter, even if he was sure that Captain Roades was led astray?"

"Led astray." "Could never speak." The two phrases struck fire in her mind. Ambrose offered no explanation of them. Knowing how circumspect he was in shipboard matters, she kept her lips pressed tightly together to keep back the sickening dismay in her heart, where old, half-formed suspicions were taking clearer shape, after long suppression by her headstrong devotion to Roades.

Ambrose said in a gentle tone, "Cap'n Nora, I can say nothing of what was said to me in your foc'sle. 'Twould be dishonest! But I can say what was told to me ashore. And if shipboard talk pushes me on to speak—why—I can't help it!"

"For heaven's sake, Ambrose, speak!"

"The *Hind's* people know that John Corkery and his poor brother were hated—aye! hated—and feared by Parran and Billy Atkins. And—I'm sorry to say it, my dear—but by Captain Roades, too. There was more in that cursing on your wharf than the death of James!"

"But why? Why?"

"I cannot tell you, my dear child. I don't know. There's one man who knows that. The same one that has the story of James Corkery's death. And that man loves you like his own daughter."

"Who is that man?"

"The man accused by Roades. The Lisbon."

At this, he closed his hand fondly over her arm, tossed back his head and resumed his masquerade. He laughed and said, "My dear, this must be Mr. Bannister's establishment. Indeed, there's the fellow's name!" He flourished his arm toward a sign swinging over the shanty.

They marched, arm-in-arm, through the gate.

HARDEGON nudged Bannister and whispered, "Well, for Pete's sake! Ain't that a handsome wench!"

Bannister cackled and tried to crow. "Ain't seen a finer pair of legs since Widow Dumbra skipped jail!"

"Limbs," corrected Hardegon. "Limbs, if you please."

"Limbs?"

"That's what we say in Boston, where she comes from. Unless I miss my guess. Limbs. Not legs."

"Well, Captain, we ain't in Boston and nowhere near it. So legs they is and legs they will remain and a finer set I ain't laid eyes on since Ellie Jorkan got knifed." He crowed. "What in the name of porridge do you figure such a lot is doing on my tumbledown?"

Hardegon replied, "You've got me, Mr. Bannister. Although, to tell the truth, that old gentleman has a familiar look, hasn't he?" Without waiting for an answer, he said, "Don't mind me. Take care of them. Maybe he's a contractor for army beef."

"Could be. Could be." Bannister trembled with the force of revived hopes. "Must be. Must be. I've seen that face somewhere long ago."

Hardegon whispered, "Might be in a newspaper somewhere. Looks like important money to me, Mr. Bannister."

Bannister squeezed up his eyes to concentrate their fire. The man in the wonderful derby gave the young lady a paternal pat on her veiled cheek. His brilliant yellow gloves seemed to be causing him some difficulty, but he laughed it off gently and said, "No, my dear, no! Sentiment! Sentiment!"

Bannister hissed under his charred lips. He closed with Hardegon furtively and whispered, "I do believe I've seen him in a picture somewhere." That picture, could he but bring it to mind, was the business end of bait tackle on Shelburne Wharf, but it was hard to do away with the stiff collar and the pearl stickpin, not to mention the beautiful gloves.

"Sentiment! Sentiment!" the vision of sartorial splendor repeated as he drew near. And then, to Bannister, "My good fellow! A dollar for you. Go find Mr. Bannister and tell him I am here. There now. Hurry along! No delay. No tarrying, if you understand what I mean."

This was really wonderful to Hardegon; because the speech was delivered in an excellent imitation of that bad imitation which some Bostonians use for English. Bannister became "Bahnister." The bubble and flow of words was surprising, even though Hardegon had always known Ambrose had the gift of gab. It was the richness of the gift that pleased him, especially because he could see that both the old man and Nora were far from being at ease. He saw the strained look in the old eyes and, in her, he saw the taut mouth below the veil.

Bannister touched the brim of his hat and tugged courteously. This won him such a smile from under the veil that he began to quiver. He was, as they say, rendered helpless. He managed a stammered, "W-wot?"

In order to relieve the actors of any doubt concerning his own cue, Captain Hardegon gave his own cap a tug and said in a respectful tone, "This here person is poor Mr. Bannister. Himself."

The gentleman raised the port brow. He also raised his yellow-gloved hand, in which an American dollar blew tantalizingly. With just the proper air of distaste that Mr. Bannister loved to create in others, the gentleman released the bill. "Ah, you are Bannister? Ah! You may have the dollar just the same." He cleared his throat and said loudly, "Sentiment! Sentiment, my dear Bannister. Do pick it up. Have your boots repaired, my poor man. Do!"

Bannister clawed up the bill in a gullish swoop and went south with it, into the rags. "Wot?" said he, half paralyzed by this first success. "Wot's wanted, gentleman?"

"A mere nothing, my good man. A mere matter of an old man's sentiment. A family matter, Mr. Bannister."

A forward movement by the lady halted his flow of words. He escorted her to the stringpiece, where he gave Bannister a warning glance against interference.

There, at last, she looked down upon the ruin of the *Western Star*. In that first, trying moment, she did not lift her head. Wrapped in melancholy, bowed by it, she gazed at the scarred, glass-scattered deck. A moan escaped her tinted lips; then, whispering some passionate phrases to herself, she crossed her elegant arms and gazed into the past.

Hardegon, waiting in anxiety for the next

cue, saw her profile against the water. His anxiety grew because he could tell that the look of distress on her face was not too difficult for her to maintain. It was no pretense.

He took Bannister by the arm and drew him back a step. He whispered, "Listen to me, Bannister. You watch yourself! Here's a pair of the right sort. Part of the old owner's family, unless I miss my guess. They're going to buy her!" He tightened his grasp and peered into the warming, little eyes. "Grab it. The first offer. Sign them up, right here and now. I know this crowd." He tapped his skull lightly. "For me—ten per cent!"

"Five!" whispered Bannister quickly. "Five's the best I can do."

"Eight!" whispered Hardegon. "Must have eight. Down and out, you know."

"Split the difference," said Bannister. "That's six and a half."

"Done!"

Bannister advanced. His hands crept together to hide their trembling. Avarice dripped from his mouth like grease from a hot goose. He clutched at his hat again and, faint with longing, whispered to the gentleman, "Wot? Wot's wanted, please?"

The gentleman drew a wallet from his ulster pocket and, handing it in the grand manner to Hardegon, said, 'My boy, take what your employer requires. I make no bones about it, as the vulgar say. It is my intention to purchase the *Western Star,* Mr. Bannister. To purchase her, sir, here and now." He drew himself up an inch more and said in a sad tone, "It's a matter of sentiment, my dear sir. Family sentiment that can be of no concern to you."

Hardegon opened the wallet and worked up a bill so that the *100* on its beautiful face appeared.

Mr. Bannister gazed in rapture at the bill. He took a taste of it with his eyes, swallowed the taste, and, without lifting his gaze, asked, "What was you thinking of paying for her, gentleman?"

The gentleman gave a main-boom sweep of his arm. "Mr. Bannister, money is no object! None, sir! We—that is, the family—we are able to indulge in these little sentimentalities, sir." He gave the lady an affectionate glance and took her hand gently into his grasp. "It is my intention—yes! my child, yes!—to have this lovely ruin—for such it is, sir—to have her pulled far beyond the surrounding and bordering lands, far to the bounding main, sir, where once she lived and conquered in her glory. And there, Mr. Bannister, there, where only the gulls may see and mourn for her departed splendor—there she shall burn!" He swept gleaming gloves high over Bannister's upturn face. "Burn! Burn!"

"Burn? Burn?" Mr. Bannister jerked his glance back toward the magic bill. Captain Hardegon, with a fast, sly wink, extended his hand over it and held his fingers out. He meant, "The price is five hundred."

THE old gentleman struck a tremendous blow at his barrel-like chest. "I said *burn,* sir, and burn it shall be! Aye! Let her tattered ensign flame! Long has it waved on high! Burn, Mr. Bannister! So that her ashes, sacred to the altars of memory, may settle in peace upon the billows that she loved and ruled in the glory and strength of her youth." He touched his eyes gently and coughed behind the glove to hide his undeniable tears.

In Hardegon's opinion, this was going a little too far. His anxiety increased. But the money had worked its magic on Bannister. He was almost in a frenzy. His claws twitched furiously.

The young lady apparently had a feeling similar to Hardegon's about the eloquence. He saw her close her fingers in warning on the arm that embraced her. She whispered, "No, Uncle! Let the *Western Star* go as she went long ago in happier days. Let her go down this river, pushed by her own sail, and go into the ocean and there, Uncle, let her—let her be—" She halted in charming awkwardness.

"Scuttled?" suggested Hardegon.

"Thank you, sir," she said in a prim fashion.

Bannister could stand it no longer. He said briskly, "Five hundred dollars!"

"Sufficient unto the day is the work thereof!" murmured the old gentleman. "If, Mr. Bannister, you say five hundred—five hundred it shall be. A costly whim, no doubt. Costly. But count it out, young man."

"Five hundred," repeated Hardegon. "American dollars, Mr. Bannister?"

Bannister's heart, which he had never heard from before, almost broke. Oddly enough, he giggled. No doubt, he believed Hardegon was insane to bring up the matter of exchange. He said hastily, "American, of course. The gentleman means American dollars, I'm sure."

The gentleman nodded and said, "For this—this honorarium, Mr. Bannister, let it be our understanding—correct me if I am wrong, young man!—that you will assist us in our sentimental plans. If not—" He looked aloft.

Hardegon winked hard at Bannister.

"Yes!" cried Bannister.

"Sentiment is strong amongst us, Mr. Bannister. Nevertheless—well, you will surely assist us to the extent of a pump to free her from the water that by now must have seeped into her cellar?"

"Yes!" shouted Bannister. He held out a pleading hand to Hardegon, who was thumbing over the bills rather clumsily. Hardegon drew away.

"And the use of any materials that may be necessary? Such as nails, tacks, strings and—er, yes!—sailing cloth? That is, what you call—"

"Canvas!" said Hardegon. He bowed his head over the bills to hide his laughing eyes.

"Spars and sails are there. Such as they are, you have them!" Bannister bustled over to Hardegon and whispered, "Now then! Now then, doryman!"

"And the men we shall engage for this venture," asked the lady. "Have you some workmen that might assist those we may find?"

"Three at five dollars a day, ma'am."

"Ah, you are kind! Kind, Mr. Bannister." She glanced at him through the veil and then whispered again to the old gentleman, who, turning to Hardegon, asked, "Young man, permit me to ask—can you write?"

"Can I what?" shouted Hardegon.

She gave him a frown and he fell back, having remembered in time that neither Bannister nor old Ambrose could do much more than scrawl their names.

"A plain question, Captain!" shouted Bannister in pitiful anxiety lest one or another of the madmen cheat him at the last moment. "Say yes and that's all there is to it. Oh, the good Lord have mercy when His cold wind blows!"

By this time, a great deal of sweat was pouring off his brow and the cleft in his little chin was quite filled up with the foam of desire. He was, in fact, more than half mad himself. Before he could speak again, Hardegon had begun to write the bargain out on a sheet of paper. All present signed it and witnessed it, and Hardegon thrust the paper into the old gentleman's wallet before Bannister could try to make out the names. Hardegon explained that the document and the ship's papers must be shown at once to the customs and various others.

The gentleman and lady bowed and walked away.

Bannister again stretched out his yearning hands. Hardegon slowly counted the five hundred, bill by bill, and laid them on the hands.

"Now," he said happily, "my commission. For a poor doryman, Mr. Bannister."

Bannister stuffed the bills into his pocket. After he had them all put away, he began pulling them out again, one by one, until he found a ten-dollar bill. He lingered over it a while, then gave it to Hardegon, saying: "Two per cent, you said. And there's my own commission on your part of the deal. But I'll forgive ye that."

"Thank you," said Hardegon. "I won't be needing your old gobstick now or your oil clothing, Mr. Bannister. I'll buy me new gear. So I will."

Hardegon pointed to the stranger dory. It was now coming directly toward the *Western Star*. Hardegon said, "The new owners waste no time, Bannister. A businessman all right, I guess."

"Business! Business! Ha! Ha!" Bannister rapped his knuckles against the roll of bills under his patches. "Call it business, if you like, Captain. I call it something else. I merely sells this floating tumbledown—for which I paid nothing, nothing!—for five hundred dollars to a set of madmen. They're as mad as the old owner was. And he shot himself. He did! I heard the shot myself as I come aboard with beef."

THE four old dorymen pulled up to the yacht. They threw hammers and sledges aboard and flung off their jackets, began to clear the deck of fragments of glass and junk. Hardegon heard one of them sing out cheerfully, "Sure, she'll make do!"

Bannister said, "Had their men ready all right. Pretty sure of himself, old codger was."

Hardegon perceived that, quite slowly, the cattle dealer was beginning to suspect that all was not as cozy as he had thought.

Bannister asked, "Where's that dory from, Captain?"

"Lord only knows! From a shipyard?"

"Must be. Must be."

Hardegon began to enjoy himself. He sat there for a long while by old Bannister's side, listening to all sorts of tales about the cattle business and poor profits. He sat there until the *Golden Hind* herself appeared down the river under headsails. A string of dories lay astern. These were loaded with gear and tools and stores.

Hardegon glanced sideways at Bannister, who was trying to make out the name of the vessel. "Why," he cried at last, "looks like that *Golden Hind* of Gloucester! Now what in the name of porridge is she coming up to my tumbledown for?"

"Wait and see."

The next dory that came up to the *Western Star* was manned by the Lisbon and old Ambrose. Ambrose had changed into his working clothes. He still wore the handsome yellow gloves. He waved one of them amiably at Bannister and then turned to give the Lisbon a hand in lifting a small anvil to the *Western Star's* deck. The Lisbon was the best blacksmith in the Gloucester fleet. There wasn't a bolt or a shackle on the *Hind* that he hadn't forged himself.

Bannister began in a quavering voice, "Isn't that—say! Ain't he pretty seamanlike all of a sudden—that nice old gentleman?" He paused. Another dory had come alongside. Captain Roades and Nora were in it. She, too, had put on her doryman togs again, but there was no mistaking her for a doryman. She stood to one side while the other dories came up and put over axes and hammers and kegs of nails.

Hardegon took a sly glance at Bannister's face, which had now taken on a saffron hue. Thinking it was about time to gaff the fish, Hardegon said, "Yes, that's the *Golden Hind* and that girl in trousers is the granddaughter

of an old friend of yours. Captain Doonan. She's the owner of the *Hind* now. Did you know that, Bannister?"

The wind whistled in Bannister's pipe.

Captain Roades walked down the deck of the *Western Star* and stood there, looking up at Bannister. He gave no greeting to Hardegon. There was a coarse expression hidden under the bland gaze that he fixed on Bannister. Hardegon couldn't tell whether Roades was trying to hide his contempt for a cheater cheated or whether there was another sort of emotion—anger—hidden there.

Roades said, "Bannister!"

"Yes, Captain. Haven't had the pleasure of doing business with you for some time."

"No," replied Roades; and, in a blunt fashion, added, "But you've done a fine stroke of business here today, my friend."

Bannister at once became more cheerful. "I have, indeed!"

Roades said, "You wouldn't be thinking of giving back the *Hind* any of that money you stole from us, would you?"

"A speculation's a speculation!" cried Bannister. "You lost Doonan's money fair and I lost mine fair!"

"You're a dirty liar, Bannister!" said Roades. Such a fierce hatred came into his eyes that Bannister fell back a step. Roades went on, "Anyway, you've sold the *Western Star?*"

"I did."

"You know now that you sold her to Nora Doonan?"

Bannister shook visibly. He tried to speak, but failed to push the words out.

"Keel and all?" asked Roades.

"Keel?" shouted Bannister, his tongue clacking again. "Yes! Keel and all! What's it to you, Captain? What you staring at?"

"I just wanted you to know," said Roades, with a hotter mixture of scorn and anger in his voice, "that the keel's been sold to a party in Boston for fifteen thousand dollars."

Bannister stiffened, then began to sway. He struggled for his balance. He capered slowly and fought within him against the image of fifteen thousand dollars gone. He lifted his claws and ran with a hopping step toward Hardegon. He screeched and struck. Hardegon flung up his hands to keep them from breaking Bannister in two. The blow fell on Hardegon's mouth. Blood started. Bannister clawed furiously and screamed, "Old gobstick, eh? Yankee swine!" Hardegon stepped away. Mr. Bannister fell at his feet. He had fainted.

Despite the poor quality of the man who had struck him, the blow had angered Hardegon. He didn't like the taste of his own blood, no more than any man. His disgust for Bannister became part of his hatred for Roades and Atkins. He saw clearly enough that this first victory by Nora and the *Hind* had been a grave blow to them. He might have been satisfied with the scorn that he put into his glance. However, Roades' own anger led him to say something that Hardegon couldn't take quietly.

Having seen Bannister's blow and heard his words, Roades said in a sneering voice, "So you're the broth of a boy who kept the mighty secret all the time?"

Hardegon wiped the blood from his lips. He spoke quite calmly at first. He said, "Yes, I helped her a little." To his fury, his memory then added the image of Roades sneaking off Parran's vessel at Gloucester. This made him let go altogether. He stepped over Bannister's body, his fists swinging clear. "This will be bad news for Parran. The fox! I wonder which one of you bootlickers will have to tell him?"

Captain Roades also took a step forward. Then he halted, his teeth pressed down on his lip. The moment that he halted, Hardegon knew, beyond all question, that Roades was no longer his own master. He could take an insult, could swallow it in the very presence of his own men.

Roades swung on his heel and came face to face with Nora. Her face had lost so much of its color that her pallor showed beneath the rich wind-tan. Her eyes were hot.

Roades tried to step by her. She held out a sheaf of papers to him. "From the customs," she said.

He took it and went on without a word.

It was left to Billy Atkins to express the thought that was in his mind, and in Roades', and would be in Parran's when the news came to him. He spat toward Bannister and said, "Well, it ain't insured—that hulk. Can't be. And how will she get it to Gloucester?"

Hardegon turned on his heel.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LISBON

DESPITE the frightening implications in old Ambrose's discreet warning, Nora could not believe that Captain Roades had deceived her purposely in his account of Corkery's death. Nor could she accept, even in the slightest degree, his hint that Roades had some secret reason for not killing fish. As for Roades' sullen attitude toward Hardegon, she easily explained it by laying it to Roades' jealousy. She had kept a great secret from him, had shared it with another man, one who had meant much to her before Roades came to Gloucester. It was only natural that he should resent this.

Nevertheless, she knew her duty. It was to follow Ambrose's advice to thrash it out with the Lisbon. With that duty in mind, she came back to the *Western Star* early the next morning after a long sleep at the tavern.

She looked down on a scene that cheered her.

An extraordinary amount of work had gone forward on the vessel. The *Hind's* people had stayed on the job most of the night. They had labored by the light of the *Hind's* old-fashioned torches and under electric lamps borrowed from American contractors at the naval base beyond the bay. Hardegon had found two able shipwrights, in addition to Bannister's three men. More than that, four capable workmen, on furlough from the Irish Regiment, had heard the uproarious story of the cheater cheated, and they had turned to on the *Star* for the pleasure of it. The work of setting up some sort of jury-rig thus went forward speedily. The stepping of the foremast would take place that morning, as soon as the stays were ready.

As for Bannister, he had actually taken the defeat so badly that he had to go to a hospital near Yarmouth. At first, bulletins of the most optimistic nature had been telephoned to Shelburne. However, he soon took a turn for the better.

Captain Hardegon came through the stockyard. He greeted her with, "Port's closed for at least two days. Maybe more. Maybe less." He told her that the eastward passage of a convoy, together with the torpedoing of an American destroyer not far from Halifax, had compelled the navies to shut up all the Nova Scotian ports. Even Gloucester had been closed by the Coast Guard.

This was irksome, because it kept the *Hind* away from the fisheries for another spell. Yet Nora's cheerful mood made her see something good even in this unforeseen delay.

She said to Dan, "Ask the Lisbon to come up here, will you? I've something to say to him."

He nodded and went aboard the *Western Star*. She saw him call out to the Lisbon, who was peering into his forge, about to begin the splicing of a wire cable.

The Lisbon came up the ladder and stood by her side. This man's name was Terrio. He was about middle age and he had the dory-man's bend in his massive shoulders. Nora thought, at first, that this unexpected labor had set him back; for he seemed careworn. His black hair had long been touched by gray. Indeed, she could hardly remember the time when his hair had been really black. Yet she was sure that he had aged even more in the few days of their voyage. She soon found out why this was so.

The Lisbon spoke happily about the work on the *Star* and assured her that Ambrose would bring the vessel safely to Gloucester.

Remembering Ambrose's declaration that the Lisbon was devoted to her, she gave up the devious approach that she had planned during the night and said, "Terry, the *Western Star* and her hull will not be enough for us. We must take home fifteen thousand dollars' worth of fish, too. Or we'll lose the *Hind* to Parran, after all."

He made no answer. His black eyes searched her eyes deeply. He shook his head gravely.

She asked, "Has Ambrose told you that I wish you to speak frankly to me?"

"He told me you are in trouble, Miss Nora. I know that, anyway." He then began a solemn consideration of his words. He wasn't a fast thinker in English. He was called "the Lisbon" because he had been born in Portugal and had come to the Banks with the Portuguese fleet when a boy. He had never ceased to fish, had never stopped talking and thinking as a Portuguese. He had to turn his thoughts out of Portuguese into English. At last, he said, "Cap'n Nora, you dress like a man aboard her and in hard work at home. You fight like a man for your vessel. You talk like one. Yet you are a woman. A young girl. So I must say, what say? Will I talk to you like I talk to a man?"

"For heaven's sake, do!"

He faced her in direct fashion then and in a harder tone said, "All right! What you mean, Miss Nora, by talking to me about full pens and need of money? I am only your doryman."

She also roughened her manner. She tried to break down his traditional deference to an owner by saying, "How can we kill fish if you are going to disobey orders aboard the *Hind* and let dories go over as you let the Corkerys go? Tell me that, Terry!"

She failed to ruffle him. He was obviously ready for this maneuver. His answer came calmly from his lips, yet she saw that the corners of his mouth had whitened, that the dark, ocean-stained cheeks had grown even darker. "It is a lie, Cap'n Nora! Terry never makes a mistake. Terry never leaves the deck until relief. Terry never lets a dory go over when the captain's order is 'no'!"

Without further urging from her, he gave her his version of the death of Corkery. Captain Roades, he said, had taken the helm himself, had sent him below to turn in. The Corkerys had not suggested the setting of the mark-buoy. Roades himself had ordered it against their wishes. It was not true that the Corkerys had gone unbidden to save the buoy. They had been forced to put the dory over by Roades. And in weather where even the bravest and the best could hardly keep afloat, not to mention fishing up a buoy. Worse than that, the mark-buoy, which was supposed to keep track of the cod, had been so poorly rigged that it had lost its anchor. It marked nothing.

Listening to his passionate and proud defense of his skill, Nora again passed into that unbearable state of apprehension and despair. Here, with those honest eyes beseeching her belief, she could not help recalling the display by Captain Roades on that night, not so long ago, when the *Hind* had returned empty. His frantic words echoed in her mind: *"You damned Lisbon, you are on watch and you let a dory out of the nest without sending for me? An*

old man like you?" Now she knew, in her secret heart, which man was damned and which was not. Yet all her nature fought against that knowledge.

THE Lisbon finished his story and waited her judgment, just as Roades had awaited it in her shop a few nights before. She grew weak in heart and body, even half closed her eyes as if that might shut out her understanding. It did not. An image, that she had once thought unforgettable, rose in her memory for the last time: a blond, Viking-like captain, steering the *Hind* to the Doonan wharf three years ago, and shouting strange Miquelon oaths and praises at sails and men. The skipper of the *Hind* had come home by rail because of sickness; and this strange doryman, whom she had never looked at twice, had become captain for a voyage, and had remained so because of her grandfather's admiration for him. And because of hers. That was Jack Roades.

She opened her eyes and said, "Terry, nobody can ever doubt your goodness and your skill. I never did! I spoke that way in order to make you talk freely."

"I have told you, Cap'n Nora."

She took a step nearer and said, "Then tell me more, Terry. What is there between Captain Roades and Captain Parran? And Atkins? He is in it, too. On my own vessel, the first day out, I heard Atkins speak in a strange way to Captain Roades. And you know I wouldn't trust Parran as far as I could heave your anvil there. Tell me, what's Parran got on Jack Roades?"

He replied without hesitation. "There be two answers to what you ask. The answers, Cap'n Nora, is always the same. First: money. Second: woman."

"Go on!"

"We all know this. Parran—he gives money to Roades all the time. For rum. For clothes. You know that there is not much money all this time on the *Hind*. Roades—he cannot pay Parran back. So! He must pay him back some way. Some time."

"And that will be when and how Parran says."

"That is right. Bear this in mind, Cap'n Nora; Parran makes big money. Thirty, forty thousand every year. He kills baby fish for it, cleans up everything for it. He is hard for more money. The *Hind*—she is the only vessel that he can get. She is worth a hundred thousand dollars to him. And more. He will do anything to get her. All Gloucester knows. You know."

"And the woman?"

His genial mouth became grim again at this question. He had no wish to speak of such things to a girl. He took his eyes away from her. By this change, she instinctively realized that the men of the *Hind* had watched her carrying on with Roades. They had been told of her engagement to him and this man, at least, had been saddened by it.

She repeated her question and added, "Speak freely, Terry. Speak your piece. I haven't been knocking around these vessels all my life for nothing!"

"The woman? Miss Nora, to us woman spells money. And money spells woman. Without money—no woman. Without woman—no money. Why fish?" He caught himself up quickly and said in a lower tone, "For myself, Miss Nora, I have my fun at home. You see, I speak to you like a man.

"Many strange things I've heard of them ashore. Parran, Atkins, and your captain. They were friends—good friends—before the captain comes to Gloucester that time. Now, there was a woman in Yarmouth. A beautiful woman. Off the Big Miquelon. First she is the captain's woman. Then Parran—he buy her. With his money. His dragger money. Then he give her back to Roades. Like that. Big shot. Then, Miss Nora, they both have her for a time."

"You mean they shared a woman? Is that what you are trying to say?"

He shook his head in bewilderment. "She shared them. The *Hind* goes out from Yarmouth. Woman goes to Boston. *Doubloon* come in there and go out again. Woman comes back to Yarmouth and the *Hind* comes in there for bait. Stays too long." He fumbled over the wooden words and whispered swifter ones in Portuguese. Then he looked at her in a strange, fierce way and said, "Now comes death!"

"Ah!"

"Who knows? Who can tell? One night in Yarmouth, they find her. The shore patrol." He swept his hand upward in a short, jerky motion. "A knife! Who knows what knife? Even Corkery is not sure and he was ashore. John, I mean. Is it a knife with a white bone handle? I do not know."

"When was this?"

"Last summer. June, maybe."

She stifled her outcry.

He said, "This I do know: each man has killed before now. On the Banks, on Miquelon, and 'longshore. One way or the other. I know this, too, Cap'n Nora. Ambrose knows it. The captain—he is Parran's little dog."

The Lisbon was well aware of the devastation he had wrought within her. Her wretched mouth and faded cheeks told him. He turned toward the *Western Star*. Already she had risen far out of the Roseway slough. The hose-pipe still spewed a flow of black bilge over the side. Even while he and Nora watched, the stream grew less.

The Lisbon sang out to the man at the pump, "How that bilge now, chum?"

The engine-man looked up cheerfully and re-

plied, "'Tis mostly rainwater, Terry. Not much stink to it, neither. Be clear in an hour or so more."

The Lisbon faced Nora again. He said, "An old man's advice, Miss Nora? You take it? Yes?"

"Yes!"

"Then say nothing. Keep hold of yourself. Do not let your captain out of your sight. Keep him in his place. Watch him! Maybe I am wrong. If I am right—he will do wrong again. Sail on the *Hind*, Cap'n Nora. Not on *Western Star*."

"I've already promised Ambrose that I'd stay on the *Hind*. I see now that I must do so."

Nora knew of old the beauty that illuminates the faces of the Portuguese when a gentle thought moves their hearts. She saw that affection in the Lisbon now. It cut through her despair and sadness, a sweet light in the dark.

THE Gloucester dorymen say, "A sou'wester is never in debt to a no'theaster."

These gales are born in different places. That is their only difference. One is the land's gift to the sea. The other is the sea's gift to the land. Tit for tat. Riding either of them out is a bad time. The ride's the same: now high, now low, now on beam-ends, and then, perhaps, hove-down and fires out.

Yet it is arranged that these blows never change. They come and they go, always sending the same eternal signals before, always drawing them away when they depart. Blue water becomes black. Whitecaps vanish. Tide rips cease their shouting. The Atlantic changes to a flat. Sun rays pierce the greenhorn's heart and make it blithe. It is a mystery to him. To the Lisbons, who have killed cod on the Banks for four centuries, there is no mystery. The clock is wound up. Let it unwind. No change in a far-off hue escapes. A darkening sea darkens their eyes. The waning of one harshness in all the Atlantic clamor fills their hearts with stir and watchfulness. They know before the glass knows. It is only discipline, the discipline that makes men free, which sends them below to read the bill of particulars.

"She fall two-tenth since noon."

The *Hind* was plugging handsomely across Emerald Bank when the Lisbon said that to Nora and Hardegon, who were talking in the sunshine shelter between the dory-nests. He said the words calmly because he had said them a hundred times before. He knew what do. He passed aft and they heard him say, "No bait-up! No bait-up!"

The dorymen had already stopped their preparations. The baskets of frosty herring began to move back toward the main hatch. Knives were thrust down into bulwark sheaths. Tubs of trawl went sliding into their old places along the rails. The washing tubs were lashed again to the chains.

The watch came up out of the cabin and spoke to the helmsman. A moment later, Captain Roades came on deck and turned his bare, blond head this way and that. He scanned the cloudless blue. He lifted his hand. At once, the topmastmen clambered into the swifters. The main-sheet gang hauled down on the stay-sail. Soon her topsails folded. Her pace declined.

The watch changed. The man who had the helm turned it over to the new watch and, before the old took his hands off the spokes, he sang out clearly, "East-by-south. One hour!"

The new watch chanted, "East-by-south! One hour!" and looked into the binnacle to see that the course left to him was the one he must keep for his hour on duty.

The new bow-watch made his way past Nora and said to Hardegon, "He says, 'Bring up the bottom!' "

"Bring up the bottom. Right!" Hardegon looked toward the forecastle companionway and met the gaze of the cook, who nodded and backed down the steps to his pantry.

Waiting for his return, Hardegon said, "'Tis bad luck, Nora, for your Ambrose and the *Western Star*."

"'Tis indeed, Dan."

No fear for the *Hind* herself drove the cheerfulness from their windstained faces. They knew which was stronger: schooner or gale. No, it was to the graying west that their eyes and hearts turned in sea-wise dismay. There, unless some mishap had already maimed her, the precious *Western Star* must now be creeping down the coast toward Cape Ann. Her exact course could not be known to them. That had been left to old Ambrose, who had been a skipper in his own right long since. It was for him to reckon how he should sail after he left the Seal Island Light behind him. Two general courses had been open to him. He might decide to drive straight across the Gulf of Maine and take his chances in the open sea. Or he might run from one harbor to the next, ready to take shelter in case of a blow. His job was to save the great keel and bring it to the melting-pot. Yet this storm had already risen in the west and, for all they knew, it might have swept between him and the land. And the land was of no great help under such a rig for off-and-on sailing.

Hardegon said, "It's hauling to the westward."

"So much the worse!"

He lent a hand on the gripes that double-lashed the dories.

Nora fell quickly into a consideration of the new and fateful circumstances. The hurried movements of the dorymen, as they snugged down the gear, gave Nora much concern; for

by the strength of the gale here, she could measure its strength beyond.

She became sullen. Their preoccupied faces made her so. A little while before, they had been eager for the fishing. On the voyage out of Shelbourne, the prospect of getting some hooks down to the bottom had made the men gay. She was aware, too, that they considered her presence aboard as a guarantee that fish would be killed if they were found. There had been much happy and boastful talk in the foc'sle and sanguine calculations on the price of fish at Boston. Their pressing, irresistible habit of good fellowship had, to a degree, ironed out the 'longshore difficulties. Even Hardegon spoke decently to Atkins when he had to, and he found no trouble, either, in working with the captain. Roades, too, put a good face on it and had driven the *Hind* skillfully to the place for her first set.

It was true that Nora, at first, had found their mealtime meetings a little trying because all hands seemed so openly intent on shaking off the queer forebodings and Jonah talk that had marked the earlier stages of the *Hind's* voyage. Yet she, too, despite the despair and doubt in her heart, had soon caught the genial infection and shared in full their anticipation of a certain harvest, and a quick one. Such a boom seemed certain to them all. Its certainty rested on nothing more than the direness of their need. Without a good stock this time and fair prices at home, the *Hind* couldn't go on. Neither could they. So every man worked hard at wishing the cod a good appetite.

"And now," she said to herself in the return of bitterness," a game not worth the candle has been stopped again."

The cook handed Hardegon a round, thick pat of butter. To make his old joke, cook waggled his head over the pat and said, "Bring it back, kid, when you're done with it."

Hardegon gave the required shout of laughter and started aft. A glittering sheaf of spray slewed them around. He said, "Better oil up, Nora. It's coming along fast, I guess."

She followed him to the break and watched while he jammed the butter into the hollow tip of the lead. He cast the lead far and let the line pay out. He worked aft a bit and presently hauled briskly, hand over hand. Without looking at the buttered tip, which would have been a breach of custom aboard that vessel, he handed it to the captain.

Roades turned the lead upside down, gazed at the tell-tale gravel, then touched it with his forefinger. He rubbed the finger back and forth over the butter. He frowned. The gravel wasn't fine enough. He knew where he was by this touch of his finger. It wasn't where he wanted to be.

"Forty fathom of water," said Hardegon.

"We're almost on it." Roades gave back the lead and added, "Heave her to. We'll have to ride it out here, if we can."

GALE and night met above her topmasts and wrestled there. Out of the last flare of day in the northwest, a purple cloud spouted and then soared, an immense rocket trailing sun-fire, from one rim of the world to the other. The blow fell upon the *Golden Hind* from that arch.

She sprang to meet it. The first boarding sea filled her gangways and forced her down until all the following seas piled on her. They came with the usual uproar to silence talk and send sighing looks around the cabin, to which Nora had been driven with the men.

The vessel cleared herself and came up to take breath full of frost and spray.

No sooner had she shaken off that first rattling welter than another and larger sea came in over the same quarter and hit her like a thousand of brick. Her empty pens boomed loudly. This booming was succeeded by such a queer noise of rending that Nora, stretched out in her bunk, couldn't help raising her head. It seemed to her that some of the standing gear had parted, had cut across the deck like a scythe.

In the next instant, the tearing sound came again. This time it whirled against the darkened skylight and she knew that it was hail, driven down like pellets of iron.

The wind then began slambanging all around the compass and punished the schooner so harshly that even the dorymen in the cabin bunks became alert and showed some signs that they feared a freakish storm which might suddenly defeat them.

This oddness of the gale lasted so long that the vessel couldn't cope with it. She was at her wit's end. She failed to keep her head into it, no matter how the watch labored at her helm. The sea cheated their skill and gave the *Hind* such a hammering that soon it was plain a new thought was running in men's minds: Is this her last one?

The seas ran over her bow with such giddy force that it wasn't possible to keep a watch forward. They retreated and hung onto the wheel.

Captain Roades finally went on deck. A moment later, Hardegon followed, taking with him a coil of rope to lash himself to the wheel; for the watch was changing and it was his trick.

Roades came below. Nora, watching him anxiously, saw with relief that he sat down as usual on the locker to pull off his boots. He had only one of them free when the Lisbon, who was lying in the bunk just forward of Nora's, slipped out and stood in his stocking-feet on that tipped and shuddering deck. He stared downward with such intensity that one might think he could pierce hull and keel and

thus draw up some secret of the storm from the bottom.

Amidst the din, Roades shouted, "What say, you?"

"I hear! You hear?" The Lisbon lifted his hand and, smiling in a queer fashion, beat slow time to some far-off, resounding music that he had chosen amongst all the other strains and discords. The repeated signals of his arm soon gave Nora the clue. Her own ear found the bass note in the west which increased in grandeur as the music-maker advanced.

Roades put on his boot again. He cursed under his breath.

The Lisbon let his arm fall. The rhythmic succession of loud notes had now emerged into one vast clamor. All lesser sounds vanished. The great sea struck and rolled thundering on, taking the *Hind* with it as if she were a chip; which, indeed, she had become, for all her hundred tons. Her lee rail went down and her stern sank in the same overturning whirl. The swift uptilting pitched Nora halfway out of her bunk. She clung on only by gripping the side with both her hands. She could look directly down into the starboard bunks. A shower of small gear and boots rattled across the cabin.

The Lisbon, who was hanging on to the companionway, looked sharply at the stove. Its door gleamed red.

The vessel whirled three times in that topsy-turvy style; then slowly, beam by beam, she found herself. Her hold began to boom her old chant again.

Roades staggered across the litter and joined the Lisbon at the companionway. Both the men stared up at the slide. Nora could tell that they were listening for a signal from the men at the wheel. It soon came: three sharp blows against the slide. This meant that the helmsmen—Hardegon and one other—lashed to the wheel in the loose Gloucester style that would save them from strangling, had hung on through the worst blow.

"Old *Hind*—she win!" The Lisbon rolled back into his bunk and closed his eyes.

That was the end of freakishness. There was nothing much left now, save the sou'wester itself.

The Lisbon lifted his head again and called out to Nora. To signify the change in his opinion, he smiled and moved both his hands outward in a flat gesture. He picked up a Sunday hat from the locker and tucked it away.

Nora pulled the blankets over her again. She lay there all the night, taking her forty winks now and then, while the *Hind* fought out the longer battle. The rising of the sun brought them a little ease. For a while, they thought the sun would scoff up the storm. It failed to do so.

The cook sent down a kettle of coffee and a bag of rolls by the hands of the foc'sle men. Hardegon had rigged lifelines in the night and the men crawled along them.

The watches changed regularly. Weary under the hammering and the lack of the big meals which their strength demanded, the dorymen passed into the useful silence by which quarrels were avoided and work smoothly shared. Yet, despite this discipline which they laid upon themselves, the strength of the storm mauled them when the day waned. The hour came when the heave-to maneuver had to end.

"I never liked Emerald Bank this time o' year," said the cook to the captain.

The cook himself had brought down a kettle of tea and a crock of cakes. He had just come from the foc'sle, which was full of wise seamen. He himself was one of the best seamen in the fleet; and he always had time to do some thinking. For these reasons, his remark amounted to a suggestion from the crew. This was customary in the fleet, where the day's work had to be directed by joint experience and thought.

Some new move had been making up in Roades' mind. Between swallows out of his sea-mug, he said, "Let her go." He spoke to Hardegon. "She'll wind up on the Middle Ground, anyway, and that's a good place to be."

SO THE *Hind* ran before the gale and made such handsome going of it that at daybreak Nora went on deck and saw the sky again. It was more black than gray, but it was beautiful to her. And, after the cabin's heat and used air, the spray had a good taste. She and Hardegon worked their way forward until they reached their customary shelter between the dory-nests.

Once the schooner had settled on her course, no sea could catch her hard. She flew up their steep hillsides and toppled down at headlong speed. Two or three times, in the late afternoon, she buried her lee side to the hatches, but she cleared herself without trouble. About four o'clock, an airplane carrier and a screen of destroyers came up to the eastward. Half an hour later, the vessels changed courses and vanished in a wall of vapor.

It wasn't long after this hour that the bow-watch was able to take his place with safety. This man had hardly gone into the shelter of the furled jib before he came back and asked Hardegon to tell the helmsman that there was a vessel under sail on the weather quarter.

"She's coming up fast, Dan," he said, "but I can't make her out."

This was risky business; for plenty of sea-room was needed in such a gale, especially because the vapor was increasing here and there.

Hardegon hurried aft and warned the helms-

man. He returned and, with a shouted word to Nora, kept on going forward. He joined the bow-watch and gazed over the crashing tops toward the other vessel. Nothing could be made out in that wilderness. He came back, watched his chance, and then ran toward the main rigging. He climbed into it.

She watched him with anxiety.

Several minutes passed. A flurry of snow blew over the *Hind* and hid him briefly. When she could see him again, he had his arm outstretched and his head turned toward the helmsman.

The helmsman lifted his hand and then gave the *Hind* a spoke or two to take her off.

Hardegon twisted about in the rigging and looked at Nora. He couldn't send a word across that noisy deck; nor could he make a sign of any meaning. Yet, somehow, she knew that he had discovered a thing of importance to her.

She lifted her hand. She looked forward and saw that Billy Atkins had come up from the forecastle. He was standing near the bow-watch and was also searching the storm.

She began to work her way toward the break. The force of the wind struck her hard when she came away from the dories. She grasped the lifeline and hung on. She bent down and plunged toward the weather rail. She laid a hand on the main rigging. At that moment, the *Hind* lurched badly. Nora waited until she came up; then she climbed into the rigging until she lay alongside Hardegon. She thrust her leg through the shrouds and made sure of her hold. She twisted about until she could scan that great expanse of flying spray and vapor.

Hardegon struck her on the shoulder. He thrust out his arm again so that she could look along it. His hand pointed directly into a stream of vapor that was closing in from the northwest. The gale kept breaking into that stream and made aisles and frosty vistas in it, some shallow, some the depth of a mile. Hills of water, black-sided and white-ridged, surged down those vistas. In frantic confusion, she swiftly looked from one opening to another, seeking the vessel that the watch had sighted. She swayed so violently in the crazy plunging of the *Hind* that she could not fix her gaze for long upon the area to which Hardegon pointed.

He shouted, "Hey!"

In anger or despair, he struck her sharply on the thigh. This made her twist her head toward him. In so doing, she caught a flash of dull light among the many flashes of foam and water pouring.

She clung to the flash. She followed it shrewdly in its dim pell-mell passage through a whirl of vapor. Judging its speed, she looked ahead until her gaze passed into an enormous cavern in the mist.

A moment later, the strange vessel careened into that cavern.

She cried in horror.

"The *Western Star!*"

Before she could say the name, the beautiful hull reeled out of sight. And all that Nora had left, for her pain and daring and hard-earned money, was the image of that hull: a bare deck, a broken foremast, a patch of mainsail, and a black, gleaming mound at her wheel.

That mound, she knew, could only be her Ambrose and his dorymen, lashed to the wheel and driving onward to a fate that she could foresee only too easily. Her fear had come true: the gale had come between them and the land.

Hardegon struck her on the shoulder.

She went down, inch by inch, to the deck. He stood by her side for a moment. They waited for the *Hind* to shake herself out of a pitch; then they ran for the shelter of the dory-nests.

Nora shrank against the weather nest; indeed, almost cowered there, her face held against a dory side. Hardegon had nothing to say. Nothing could be said. It was clear to her then that she had lost the next-to-the-last round of her battle. Unless all signs failed, five old friends were gone. Men who had stood by her for the sake of daring hearts. And the precious keel—it would go sliding into the old, eternal locker and not into the melting-pots.

She didn't blame herself. Neither did she accuse herself of the deaths of the dorymen. She knew that they were fated to die that way. It was what they were for; what they had been seeking all their lives. Constantly inviting such a death, challenging it. Now it had come. It was not a question of blame or remorse. It was a matter of pity. She hated with all her great strength the final image of their descent and surrender, their ultimate capitulation to the gale. She could see them bow their heads, could hear old Ambrose, garrulous to the last, even in drowning. "Salubrious, is it not, my friends?

"To the galley!" Hardegon kept his arm around her. Before they ventured out, he held his icy glove under her chin and turned her wan face up a little. He shouted, "Remember the copy-book, chum!" By a nod of her head, she showed that she understood his allusion to the familiar command of their childhood: *Whilst there's life—there's hope!*

All hands soon had the news of the *Western Star's* derelict passage. It was recounted with poorly-hidden satisfaction by Atkins, who, without hurting the truth, could say, "I told you so!" Roades learned it. No doubt, with satisfaction, too; although he still had enough manhood left in him to keep his face solemn. He did it with such poor grace, however, that Hardegon said to Nora, as he sat by her bunk

that night, "I wish that guy would learn to blush for himself. I'm tired of doing it for him."

CHAPTER IX

ON THE BANKS

THE *Hind* lay on the Middle Ground when the gale ran itself out. The Atlantic became green. Whitecaps filled the east. A blue wind came gently out of the west.

At once, the vessel took up her work again. Having given the sou'wester its due, she now proceeded to the next act in her own drama, her own skillful attempt to save herself. She might do it. It wouldn't be the first time she had killed thirty thousand dollars' worth of fish.

All the good habits of the Gloucester fleet came to the *Hind's* aid. The cook turned out a feast of beefsteaks and doubled the strength of the coffee. The icing on the chocolate cakes was like fudge. The men ate and began to laugh. They grinned at the vanished gale and said, "A good blow! Took us where we wanted to be." Old hands in the oldest of all the Republic's trades, the fishermen turned to with a skill perfected by Grand Bank centuries, to which they were the last heirs. They shouted words their ancestors had invented. Their knives flashed and sliced in the way their ancestors had found best. A man cried up and down the deck, "Bait up! Bait up! He says, 'Bait up!'"

Those that hadn't gone ahead on their own, tucked their pipes away and came on deck. Once again, the frosty herring came up by the tubful from the pens. The cutting-boards were laid out between the dory-nests and along the cabin bulwarks. Long, broad knives—a score of them—began the old tune: down the bait twice and thrice across.

Once the heaps of bait had started to pile up, ten men quit cutting and turned to the tubs of trawl. While their dorymates cut on, these others uncoiled the trawls and began the rapid baiting of hooks, attached to the trawl line by shorter lines called gangins. They coiled the baited trawls back into the tubs. Sidewise sweeps of knives sent the herring-heads flying and rows of golden herring-eyes, full of tardy suspicion, stared from deck and scuppers.

With shovel and broom, Nora turned to the greenhorn's job of cleaning up. She briskly heaved the scraps and heads over the side, where the gulls fed. The knives struck faster and faster until their blunt tattoo rang louder than the gay talk and the shouts to the men in the pens. The talk was gay, so gay that at times it became a chant of little meaning, except for the hope of happiness thus repeated. Yet the chant fell short of song. No man ever sang a song for a Grand Banks harvest; and no man's ever made one. Nor will now.

Within the hour, the first cry of "Enough!" was raised and the trawl tubs began sliding toward the dory-nests.

Number One dory had been the Corkery brothers! To it, Hardegon and Atkins dragged their tubs, fresh chunks of herring gleaming on the topmost coils of hooks.

The other dorymen stood by the lee tackle and swung Number One up and out to the rail. Hardegon and Atkins finished the stowing of their gear: trawl-tubs, buoys, sail, oars, anchors, water-bottles, conch horns, gobsticks and gaffs. And a bag of bread, too, for this was the *Hind's* way in winter fishing because it was the perilous season when dories might be lost in vapor and have no choice except the long row to land, and sad failure the usual portion.

Half in the dory, half out, Hardegon lay poised on the gunwale with the black keg-buoy in his arms, its blackball—a flag marked *I*, flapping in his face. Eager to try his skill again after a long absence, he kept his graceful perch until, "Buoy away!" Roades shouted and jerked his arm.

Hardegon flung the buoy down into the sea. He and Atkins took their places: Atkins at the oars, Hardegon aft at the first tub of trawl.

"Dory away!"

Number One dropped into the stream and the *Hind*, under foresail only, ambled on against the tide.

Hardegon threw over the anchor that would hold the buoy in this starting-place and looked up to the captain. Roades held out his arm to the southward and the dory moved off in that direction.

Once away, Hardegon let out a whoop. He waved his left hand to Nora and with the other he deftly slipped his heaving-stick, a willow wand, into the topmost coil of trawl. He flipped it up and outward. The baited hooks began to fly and soon the first string of the mile-long trawl, with its hundreds of hooks, was slowly drifting to the bottom fifty fathoms deep.

The first tub emptied of its strings, Hardegon knotted the second tub's length to the heaved trawl and kept on heaving. By that time, the *Hind* was growing small in the west and all her twelve dories lay at work on the southerly set, the rowers bending back and forth, the heavers gracefully up and down.

This was the old flying-set, as practised on the *Golden Hind*. And, since it had been Hardegon's first work in the fishery when a boy, he rejoiced in it. So much so, indeed, that he could pull out a grin or two for his dory-mate, who had been out a dory ever since he got a site aboard his first dragger. Some years ago, that was. "You making out well, Billy?" asked Hardegon.

Atkins grunted over the heavy oars. "She's cranky—this dory is."

"Corkery never found it so."

Atkins growled at this allusion to the man who had once sat on that thwart.

Hardegon laughed and said, "She won't be cranky, once we haul a few good cod into her. And I think we will." He paused a split second in his heaving and looked sharply at a hook hanging over his stick. "You cut bait a little fine, Billy, my boy. I'll tell you that for next time."

Atkins chose to ignore this. He said, "The tide's strong here."

"No stronger than it was a hundred years ago, I guess. You want me to spell you at the oars?"

"Heave away!"

COMING now to the last coil in the last tub, Hardegon knotted the trawl to the anchor line, which was fast to another black buoy. He heaved the gear over and signed to Atkins that he should ship his oars. This done, Hardegon set up the little mast and unfurled the leg-o'-mutton sail. He brought the dory around with a steering-oar and she began her homeward run. Atkins lay down on the bottom boards to keep out of the wind, which had a bite in it.

Number One, as usual, was the first to finish the set; despite the greenness of its men. The others were not tardy. Soon their little sails appeared at varying distances. It was a handsome sight. A few of the sails were old and stained to a yellow hue by sun and salt. Some were new white; and, far beyond, a blue sail and a green sail gleamed, making the day a gala one and all these craft a Cape Ann regatta.

Farther to the west, her foresail beaming in the sun, the *Golden Hind* began her turning toward the first buoy. Hardegon also steered to that buoy, which was his. Long before he could make out Nora at the *Hind's* helm, he saw his bouncing keg. He tied up to it to await the fishing signal from the captain, to whom it was left to judge when the cod had had time to finish luncheon.

It was while he was furling the sail, and making the empty tubs ready to take in trawls,

"Dory away!" Number One dropped into the stream and the Hind, *under foresail only, ambled on against the tide.*

that Hardegon discerned in Atkins a mild animation, a queer, tentative sort of liveliness. It was enough. No more was needed to sharpen Hardegon than any sort of cheerfulness from Atkins, Roades, or Captain Parran of the *Doubloon*. They were all sharks to him; and they livened up only when there was blood in the foam.

As soon as the dory was fast to the buoy, Atkins had gone back to his thwart. There he stuffed his pipe and puffed away. A true dragger man, he was happiest while sitting down. A little later, he grunted in a pleased, shoatish way. His pleasure was too brisk, even for such a pipe as his.

Hardegon figured out soon enough that Atkins had seen something that he himself hadn't made out yet. At first, with a thrill that pierced him keenly, he surmised that the rascal had caught sight of some sign of the *Western Star's* wreckage. He tried him out on that score, but he could make nothing of the grunting and spitting which came in reply.

In the natural course of his suspicious thought, Hardegon struck on Parran and the *Doubloon*. He said at once, "The *Doubloon* must be dragging hereabouts by now. Parran said he'd be here."

This ordinary conjecture must have seemed like alchemy to the stupid Atkins. He dropped his pipe to the bottom boards and cursed in a wail. He wasn't smart enough to keep his eyes

off the sea; that is, if it was his foolish hope to hide something from Hardegon. He shot a sideways glance to the eastward.

Hardegon stood up and looked in that direction. A dragger steamed there, black amidst the blue and white.

"Why," said Hardegon, "there's the so-and-so now, I do believe!"

He spoke in cautious cheerfulness, lest the draggerman observe his agitation. The arrival of the *Doubloon*, although expected, was not good news to Hardegon. He had his share of seaman's superstition. He really regarded Atkins as a Jonah, a source of evil luck and sorrow. And, rightly enough, he considered the *Doubloon's* captain as a sort of master Jonah, from whom worse luck came.

Under such circumstances, Hardegon could be as mean as any man. He had a bitter tongue in his head; and, although he could be silent on such near things as his five-inch mesh, he never could lay off a shirker or a crook. Now the loss of the *Western Star*, and the prospect of seeing Parran and Roades take the *Hind*, angered him, just as Nora's unspoken sorrow had saddened him.

He faced Atkins blandly and said, "Ever see a man hanged, Billy?"

As he spoke, he ran a finger inside the collar of his black sweater in a wicked gesture. He also thrust his tongue out and let it loll horribly.

"Hanged? Good God! no! How could I? See a man hanged? Why, no! No!" The picture did some damage to his complacence. He said "No!" again.

Hardegon put on a rueful look and said with a sigh, "To chuck away a man like that! Dear me!"

"Chuck a man away? Chuck who away? What the hell's wrong here, anyway?"

"Why, nothing's wrong, chum, nothing. Only I had that dream of mine last night again. About Nora's father. And he was standing by a gallows. Or under a yardarm. I couldn't make it out, Billy. But he was pulling that old joke of his. You know—'If they hang you, my friend, somebody's going to suffer!' Ha! Ha!"

Hardegon peered under his hand and murmured, "It's the *Doubloon* all right. I only hope that chump doesn't drag his lousy bag over our trawls. If he does—I'll kill him."

"Hang?" repeated Atkins. "Hang?" His own rich stream of superstition had been well stirred. He was seeking an omen. "You saw somebody under a yardarm? That's what you say, is it?"

"Bless my soul!" Captain Hardegon pretended a mild surprise that his dream life should be interesting to anybody else. "Bless my soul, Billy!" He held up his words skillfully and thus made it clear that, much against his will, he was being cajoled into a revelation he'd rather not make, especially to a party on the anxious seat. "Now that you ask me—and I make the effort to recall—why, yes, Billy, there was a face above the noose! Not what you'd call a pretty face. Nor a happy face. No! But a face, nevertheless." He had drawn Atkins into a dogfish gape by this time. Hardegon put on a graver air. "Of course, a man can't be sure of a face in a dream. But—" A roller struck the dory and gave it a dip.

Atkins cried, "Whose face in the noose? From a yardarm? Hell! That's a pretty yarn to tell a man! And you can't remember, eh?"

"I didn't say that, Billy. Oh, I can remember, all right! I just said a man can't be sure of a face seen in a dream. Say you kiss a woman in a dream. Or she cottons up to you. Well—take my advice!—don't act too hasty on it the day after." He saw that Atkins was too frightened to repeat his question. So he said in his judicious style, "You know, Billy, there's some truth in dreams, after all. Because I happen to know that you can be hanged for crimes committed at sea."

"Me?" Atkins pushed some spit onto his lips with his tongue. His Adam's apple jerked in the now-you-see-me-now-you-don't style.

"You? Excuse me, chum. My mistake. Excuse it, please. I used 'you' in a manner of speaking. A general sort of way. I meant a man can be hanged for crimes at sea. That's all."

"Aye!"

"As for that face, Billy, I'll tell you whose it was. Pass me your word first that you'll never breathe it to a living soul."

"Aye!"

"Tell it to a ghost, Billy, if you like. Happen you meet one real soon. But not to a living soul. Hey?"

"As God is my judge—" he began vehemently.

Hardegon gave him a solemn signal to stop. "That face, Billy, a-hanging there under the mid-day sun, was Parran's"—he halted—"or Roades'—"

Atkins groaned when Hardegon kept on.

"Or, if not one of those two thieves, Billy, then—"

Atkins thrust his hands down to the thwart to keep hold of the world.

"Then it was—" Hardegon, for once in his life, didn't know what to say. He was stumped. He wished to say, "Your face, Billy boy!" but, by this time, the sweat on that crumpled forehead and the agony in Atkins' eyes had stirred up his pity. He laid off. He said, "Then 'twas Corkery! John Corkery's face!"

ATKINS gripped the streaming thwart and screamed. His face changed from the drawn look that his agony had put there. It became distorted. "He won't! He won't get me! I'll rip him first! Gut him—by the God that made me!" His teeth were hidden in foam out of his mouth. "I had nothing to do with

her. I was there—oh! Nothing, Dan! So help me God!"

It was Hardegon's turn to be frightened. He was about to ask, "What had you nothing to do with?" when he found a sort of answer to his own question. He surmised that John Corkery, now serving on the approaching dragger, must have told the *Hind's* people about some deviltry done by Atkins and Roades and Parran. It was more likely that the harsh tongues in the forecastle of the *Hind* had said something to Atkins. Had Hardegon heard from Nora's lips the story of the murdered Yarmouth woman, he might have put two and two together and thus made up the sum he now puzzled over. However, Nora hadn't told him that story yet, no more than she had told him why she believed Roades had refused to kill fish. Hardegon, in fact, didn't know whether Atkins' word "her" meant a woman or a ship.

He was bent on a good-natured rescue of Atkins when two blasts from ships' horns bowled by him, the first from the east, the second from the west. Both were fishing signals. The *Doubloon* had finished its hour-and-a-half of dragging her net across the bottom and Parran had blown his horn to order his men to get the winch going and haul the bag to the top.

Hardegon saw the *Doubloon* increase speed and steer sharply to leeward, which was the side she was dragging on. The *Doubloon,* having closed the mouth of her net by this twist, began to haul it up. He heard the rasp of cables and winch. He saw how taut the wire cables of the net were at the rail and he knew this meant a good bag.

Since his own captain had also blown the fishing signal. Hardegon cried, "Here we go!" and then, "Forget what I said, Billy. 'Twas only a dream." He then went into the bow and put on horsehide half-mitts, which were to keep the trawl line from cutting his palms. After placing his gaff handy, he leaned over the gunwale and brought the buoy and anchor in.

He began to haul. The first rush of hooks were empty. A few had the bait on. He slatted the baits off against the side and kept passing the line back to Atkins, who stood amidships over an empty tub. Atkins took up the trawl and coiled it into the tub again.

Almost at once, Hardegon found that the *Hind's* luck had changed. His first fish was a fine, fat cod. In his eagerness, he handled the fish a little roughly and the hook worked out. The cod fought off. Hardegon struck out with the gaff and nailed him in the eye. He jerked the fish into the dory and shouted, "Luck's in! Now for full pens!"

He hauled with care and finally got the trawl coming up with such smoothness that he slatted off fish after fish before a few dogfish struck in. Hardegon, like all dorymen, hated the dogfish. They were the curse of the Banks. He never could bear merely to shake them off the hook and let them live to destroy more bait. He kept his knife handy and slashed off nose or tail from each one as it dangled. He killed twenty or thirty of them before the run changed and some fine haddock came up.

After a few more bare hooks, he felt an even harder strain below. It was the tug of a great halibut. The moment he saw the huge, precious flatness circling deep in the green, Hardegon let out another whoop. This was answered from the next dory. The exulting cry swept all along the line. Hardegon knew, by these repeated calls, that all the dories were killing fish fast. He gaffed the halibut, hauled it over the gunwale and sent it thrashing down into the mass of cod and haddock, piled in bloody water.

Now came Atkins' turn to haul. Hardegon was already slowing up. A long time had passed since he had put his back into that work. The strain told on him. His cheeks ran with sweat. His arms ached.

Yet he was so glad to be killing fish again that he couldn't stand Atkins' clumsiness when he took over. Hardegon dropped the coiling trawl and gave his dorymate a harsh word for slow work.

"Once a draggerman—always so! Why the hell don't you haul?"

He drove Atkins out of the bow and finished hauling himself. By the time the dory reached the outer buoy, it was full to overflowing. He secured the buoy and hoisted the sail. Once under way, he scanned the westward sea. Two other sails had been hoisted, but he had the start on them and came alongside the *Hind* first of all, his sail down, his painter ready.

He flung the painter to Nora. She gave it a turn. The cook brought the dory around with a boat-hook and Roades handed down the pitchforks. He made no comment on the load of fish. Nora and the cook were overjoyed.

Hardegon had kept the big halibut on top. It weighed well over a hundred pounds. He now drove the tines into it and heaved the prize into the checkers that had been set up to form pens on deck. The moment the big fish struck aboard, he cried out, "One for the bank!" And to Nora, he said, "See your friend coming up?"

Nora put a strain on the painter to keep the heavy dory in. She gave a sour glance at the *Doubloon,* which was moving off to eastward, and replied, "I see Parran all right. And I'd rather see this!" She jerked head toward the load of fish.

From that moment, there was no time for anything but fish. There was time to breathe. That's about all. Dory after dory came up, to one side or the other, and the forks kept the cod flying. Long before evening came, the *Hind* had fifteen thousand pounds in the checkers.

The dories were back in the nests. The dory-plugs were out and the pump sent a

stream up to carry off the darkened water that poured out of them.

Without a break in the intense rhythm of their labor, the dorymen set up cutting tables and troughs to carry off blood and guts and catfish heads. Rippers and gutters took their places. Knives flashed again. The dressed fish flopped into big tubs, where the idlers stirred them, washed them, and forked them toward the hatch. Just as the last fish slipped into the pens, the cook called the first gang to dinner.

The *Hind* was certainly alive now. The men were more than ever joyful. All their hopes seemed justified and the last signs of uneasiness vanished. Even the presence of the *Doubloon* failed to mar their pleasure. Yet the nearness of that vessel left its mark. Captain Roades had fallen into the listless mood that Parran always created in him. He had gone down to dinner with the first gang, as usual. He had hardly taken a mouthful of soup before he muttered something and left the forecastle.

His action brought on another, which, in turn, led to a crisis. Ordinarily, a captain's moods, and especially his behavior at table, are not open to comment by dorymen, despite the familiarity created by the intimate part he takes in the ship's work. In the case of Roades, this convention had always been observed, the more strictly because the men weren't overfond of him. Of course, there was no telling what the men said of him while they were out hauling. Aboard, they kept the rule.

At his abrupt departure, the ill feeling that his secret actions had created forced the men to burst through the barrier of habit.

A MAN seated next to the Lisbon put down his spoon and watched Roades' boots drag up the steps. This watchful one was the oldest hand on the vessel and had once been mate on the old *Columbia*. He commanded respect, and not only because of his gray hairs.

When the slide had closed, he looked about in a deliberate manner until he had forced others to look at him. He then spoke in such a way that it was plain he intended to answer his own question if no one else did. He asked in a loud voice, "What's the matter with him now?"

Hardegon, fully aware of trouble ahead, lightly touched Nora with his elbow and, in order that all things should be clear, asked brightly, "What's the matter with who?"

The doryman understood this device. He replied, "The captain. Is he off his feed?"

At this, the others stopped eating. A few bent forward to look at the speaker. Others gazed solemnly into their plates. The speaker went on, "Here we have a couple of pens full, at last, and it puts him off his feed."

So far, his tone might have been taken for one of vexed solicitude for a shipmate. Knowing this and not wanting it, he changed to insolence. He said, "Maybe he doesn't like the smell of fish."

This was nothing less than an accusation of Roades. The words could have been laughed off. No one laughed. Consequently, Nora, as the owner of the schooner, had the issue squarely before her. She knew that they all believed Roades had betrayed them and her by not doing his duty. Obviously, the rebel meant to say that Roades had stopped them from killing fish before and was likely to do so again. This was a destruction of their livelihood and they wanted to know why.

Nora said, "Make your meaning clear, Clem. You're among friends."

"I know that, Cap'n Nora." He deliberately finished his soup and sopped out his plate. "A short and simple answer from a short and simple man. That's what you want and what you'll get. Here it is, miss. Three times in the last two voyages that captain of yours has hauled up and left good fish behind him. We all know it. Always some kind of reason, but no good reason. No man here will deny it."

He paused. No man made a denial.

He went on. "I don't know anybody who's ever been in a dory with him and I don't know too much about him otherwise. But I know he's been drinking aboard this vessel for a long time and I know we could have brought home a hundred thousand pounds last trip. And we didn't! No! Instead of that, we lose a good fishermen—Jim Corkery—and come home owing the vessel money again. Now what we want to know is: why?"

Nora answered at once. "I know. And I'll tell you." She gave them a reassuring smile to divide amongst them and pushed a tray of halibut steaks toward old Clem. "No reason why we shouldn't eat just the same. Scoff it up!" They all fell to again and she said, "What I say can be repeated freely to the other gang and to the men on watch."

"Except," said Hardegon coldly, "to the foul Jonah—Atkins."

"Very well." She then told them all she knew, all she feared. Most of her story, as she was well aware, had been known to them already, or suspected. She told them flatly that Captain Roades was Parran's follower.

Hardegon bent his head over his plate. Her knowledge of this fact was news to him.

She told them of the hundred thousand dollars offered to her by the syndicate for the *Golden Hind*. She described her refusal. At this, they murmured and became brighter; because they were learning again the kind of wood out of which she was carved. She told them of all the money the vessel owed to Parran and made no bones about declaring that, if the trip failed, he would be able to take the

vessel away from them. "It's either Parran or the West Indies. Full pens and a high price at Boston might hold her for a while. Nothing else! I hoped that the *Western Star* and her keel would turn the trick. Now she's gone and that leaves it up to us."

She paused and fished out a steak for her own plate. "As to how Jack Roades falls so low as to take dirty orders from a dragger captain like Parran—and takes whiskey aboard my vessel—well! I'll leave that part to those amongst you who know the Yarmouth story and some others. It's not a tale a girl will foul her mouth with!"

Hardegon jerked up his head. "The Yarmouth story?"

She gave to the Lisbon a special look which signified that she was leaving that part to him. He nodded.

"I'll tell you this much more," Nora continued. "I came along this time chiefly for the *Western Star* venture. I really didn't have the money to pay a railroad fare and I had to get those poor men along with me. I stayed aboard after we took bait because I figured out something was wrong and I thought it my duty to find out. Poor Ambrose told me 'twas my duty to you and to the *Hind*.

"I think I've found out the truth. Let us bear this mind: there's war between us and Parran. Between the *Hind* and the *Doubloon*. And our captain—God help him!—isn't on our side. Neither is Atkins." She pushed her mug toward the tea kettle and waited until old Clem had filled it." I want to tell you that I know times are changing. The Banks are changing and markets are, too. I know why you stay dory-trawling. Why you like it. It's your life. And nature provides that only a fair-sized fish will eat a bait. A baby fish won't. Or can't. That's why we don't have to be ashamed of what's in our pens tonight. We're not destroying the fisheries. As that fool Parran and some others are doing. Killing little fish with nets for the sake of a fillet of flesh. But nature provides, too, that an under-sized fish can get through a decent mesh and live. Some draggers want them. They'll all come to it, just as the English and the Danes did." She turned toward Hardegon. "This man here gave up the draggers and the big money and went back into a dory because he wouldn't destroy what nature gives to us all. He has his ideas. You know what they are as well as I do. The five-inch mesh he has on my wharf won't kill small fish. Well, chums, if ever we get home and are free men again—maybe this is the man that will go skipper of a new *Hind*. And if we get the money—if we beat Parran here—maybe she'll be a smart dragger, after all. I can't tell yet."

She turned to Clem and was about to speak again when he began. He spoke for all of them. He said in a sober tone, "This is fair talk and useful, good talk. All here will stand by with an eye peeled and gaffs ready." He let a measure of happiness return to his face and added, "As for Dan Hardegon here—well enough! He's a good man aboard a vessel and as fond of the *Hind* as we be. But I do wish you'd go skipper of her yourself, Cap'n Nora!"

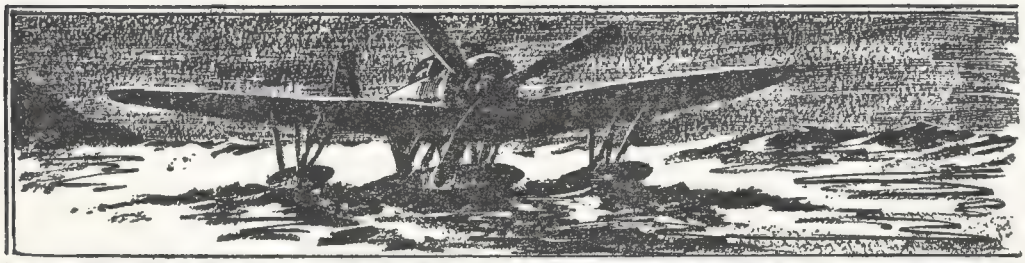
She joined their laughter, which was good to hear, and said, "What about the fish that are on the feed now? Do we get them tomorow or will we be foxed out of them?"

"Get them! We'll kill forty thousand!"

Hardegon said, "On the Middle Ground this time of year—tides and winds being what they are—we'll be needing a mark-buoy. It's a thing I don't like, as a rule, but thereby we'll not have to take any man's words as to where the fish are and where the vessel is lying."

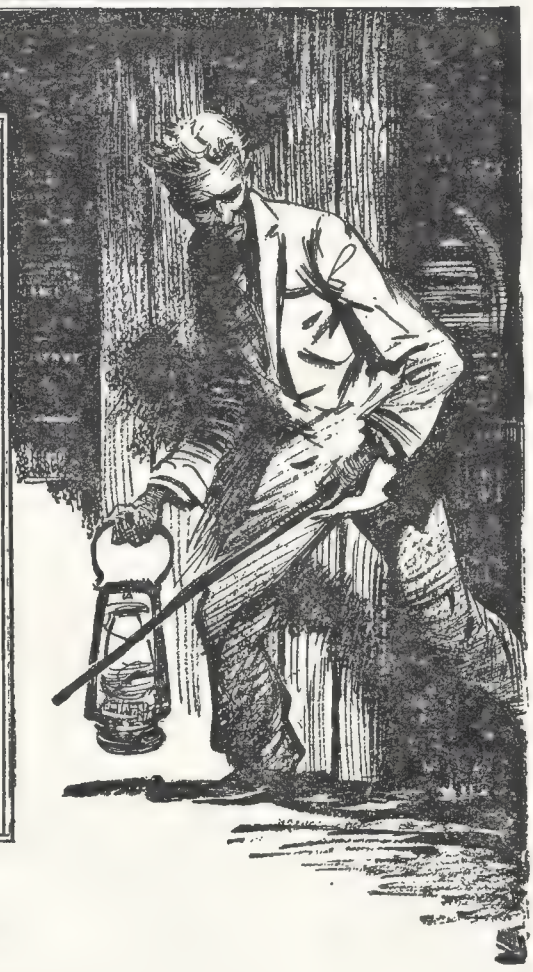
"Go tell that to the captain," said Nora, "and see that it is done." She ate the last of her bread pudding and stood up. "Or, better still, I'll tell him myself. And some other things."

(End of Part III)



Last Betrayal

By M. V. HEBERDEN



"I KNOW your feelings about the Irish question, Brandon," said Colonel Smithshand and stopped.

"Do you?" inquired the dark man seated across the desk from him. One eyebrow was a trifle raised and his curiously light gray eyes held a sardonic amusement.

The Intelligence chief made a slight gesture of annoyance. Major Brandon was without doubt the best man he had, but he was also, upon occasion, the most irritating. The soundproofed office in the heart of London was unnaturally quiet.

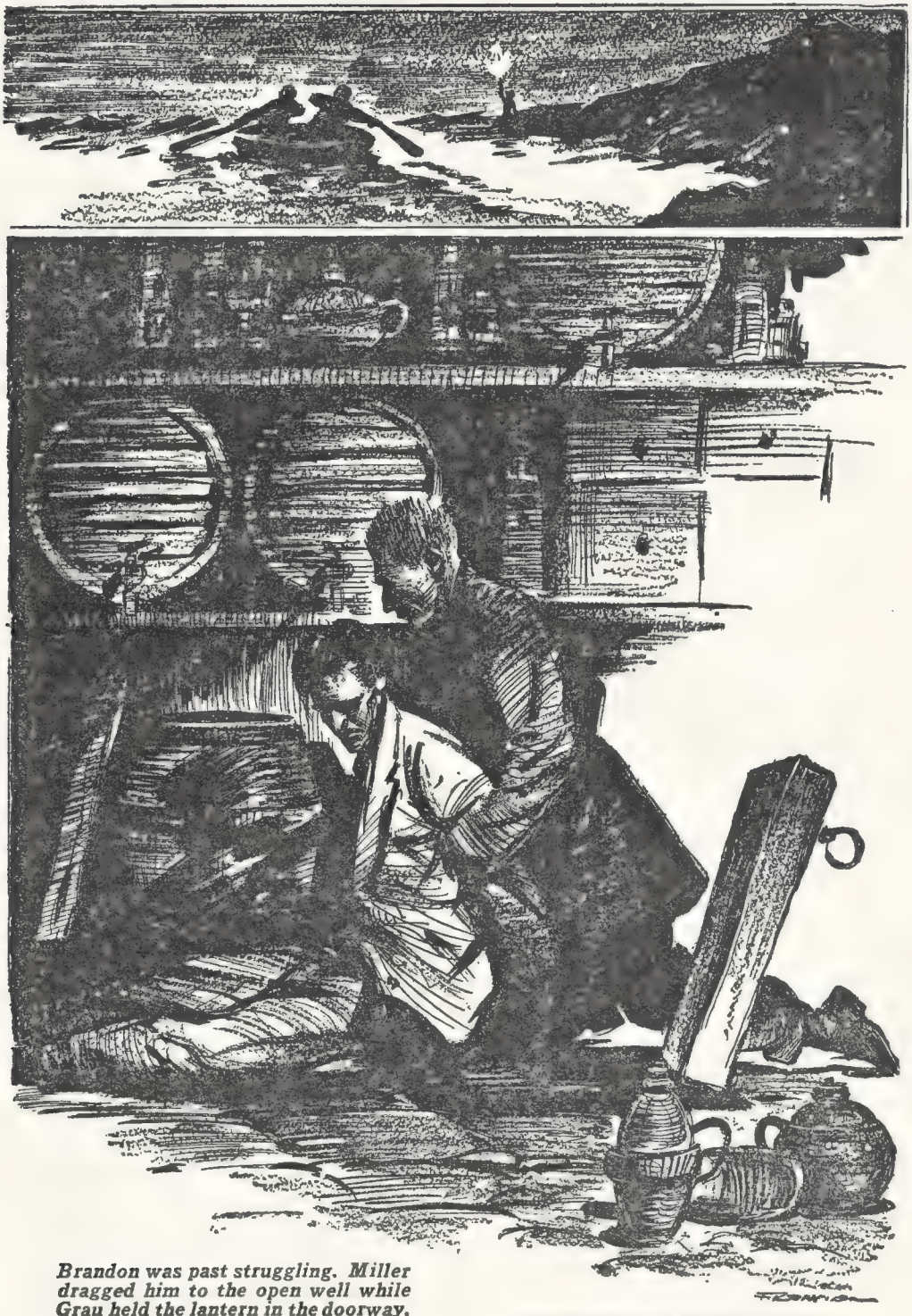
"In spite of being Irish, your family—and you—have always served the British Crown," Colonel Smithshand began again.

"In other words," cut in Brandon, "you've got a dirty job that needs doing in Eire. Tell me what it is and I'll tell you if I'll do it."

It was Smithshand's turn to raise his eyebrows. "I can give you orders," he said quietly.

A hard smile twisted Brandon's mouth. "I'm on sick leave. I came out of hospital this morning with an imposing array of medical opinion protesting that I shouldn't leave and that I certainly wasn't fit for duty."

Smithshand was silent for a while, then he shrugged his shoulders. "Here's the story," he



Brandon was past struggling. Miller dragged him to the open well while Grau held the lantern in the doorway.

ILLUSTRATED BY FRANK KRAMER

said, and talked for a long time. "We've broken other spy rings there," he finished, "but this one is the best organized. We can't get any concrete evidence to present to the Irish government, and without it, they won't act."

"Why are you so sure this ring hasn't got its headquarters in Dublin?" asked Brandon. "Seems the obvious place."

"You can go through these files later." The colonel pointed to a thick folder on his desk. "Everything seems to indicate that they are operating from somewhere on the southwest coast, in Cork or Kerry. Jim Farrel's in Cork. He's a good man."

"Yes. I know him," said Brandon.

"So far, the Irish police don't seem to be on to the fact that he's one of our men. If possible, I'd like to keep him under cover. But if it's necessary to clear this up, use him."

Brandon said, "You are worried about it."

Smithshand nodded. "It must be done quickly. One report has made me wonder if they were using Bantry Bay to land and take off agents as they did in the last war."

"Could be," agreed Brandon. "Still, I'd say any strangers would be pretty noticeable down there."

"Our men stick out like sore thumbs when they go. You wouldn't."

Brandon's gray eyes were amused. "I'm taken for an Englishman in Eire because of my accent."

"But damn it, man, your family is in Kerry!"

"What's left of them." A shadow passed over the dark face. "My sister and Shane's widow. That's all, now."

"The last three men I've sent haven't come back," said Smithshand a little later. "Taylor fell off a cliff near Muckross Abbey in Killarney. Ferguson's body was washed ashore south of Bantry. And Denham I haven't heard from."

"Was that Ted Ferguson?" asked Brandon.

"Yes. Friend of yours, wasn't he?"

"You knew that," answered Brandon and the gray eyes, which Smithshand always thought looked as if they'd seen too much, were hard.

THREE days later a man at the border slipped Brandon across. "Now you'll be remembering, if you come back, the patrol goes by at six and eleven and then not until seven. And mine's the third cottage."

Brandon turned up the collar of his trenchcoat against the light rain and said, "You mean *when* I come back."

"I mean *if*," said the old man stubbornly. "Of the last three that have crossed, I've not seen hide nor hair of 'em since. Good luck, dark man."

Brandon trudged along the muddy road, breathing in the queer damp smell which is unlike the smell in any other country anywhere. Dawn was breaking and the rain had stopped when he reached the village where, with any luck, he'd be able to pick up a train for Dublin. The little station was deserted and inquiry at the nearest house provided the information that the station master was out feeding the pigs. Brandon found the old man.

"Sure and it'll be along in a little while. When Phelan—he's the driver—went by last night, he promised to fetch down a bucket of milk from my brother's place up the line, *her* being dry now." A wave of his hand indicated the cow, which stood swishing its tail against non-existent flies.

"Where can I get something to eat?" asked Brandon.

"The old woman'll give you a dish of tea and porridge, if that'll do you." Shrewd old blue eyes looked him over. "There's more coming and going across the border," he muttered, "and no good'll come of it."

About an hour and a half later the train ambled in, bringing the bucket of milk, and Brandon got aboard. It brought him to Dublin with a two-hour wait for the next Cork train. He wandered out of the Amiens Road station, meditated on going up to the Shelbourne and decided against it. So he crossed over to the North Star Hotel and ate some of the fine ham that he remembered and drank some of their excellent whiskey.

The Cork train arrived at its destination only half an hour late and Brandon checked in at the Metropole Hotel. He was tired—sufficiently tired to realize that the doctor hadn't been fooling when he'd said he wasn't ready to leave the hospital. Early next morning he rented a car. There was the usual trouble about petrol, because of the shortage, but a banknote uncovered a cache known only to the porter of the Metropole. Thus equipped, he set out along the winding road down to Bantry.

Vickers Hotel was as clean and spotless as when he last saw it, but the proprietor looked him over with ill-concealed hostility as he turned the register around for him to sign. He looked at the signature and said, " 'Tis a good name, Brandon."

"Is it perhaps my grandfather that you remember?"

"Him that had the horses at Hill House, north of Dunmanus?" When Brandon nodded, the proprietor was launched. Some fifteen minutes later he stopped abruptly and said, "And what are you doing with that accent on you?"

"Lived among the English. Educated there."

"And you'll be fighting for them, I'll be bound."

"Right now I'm not fighting for anybody. I'm ill and I need a rest. I came back here for it."

The proprietor's eyes rested doubtfully on the dark face as if they didn't quite believe the story. Then he shrugged his shoulders and said, " 'Tis a nice peaceful room I'm giving

you. The fellow who had it before you went out one day and never came back. So after he'd been gone a week, I cleared his things out and I'm holding them against his bill."

"Never came back? That's odd, isn't it? What d'you suppose happened to him?"

"I wouldn't be knowing. But he was a great one for asking questions. Sometimes it's not wise to be asking too many questions."

During the next three days Brandon gave an excellent imitation of a man with nothing to do, plenty of money to bribe hidden stores of petrol from their hiding places, and a restless urge to drive around the countryside all day and half the night. He didn't ask questions, except about the crops, and sympathized with the farmers' difficulties, which were legion. The people in the village were not friendly and only the proprietor's word that he was one of the Brandons of Hill House prevented their being actually hostile.

At the end of the three days, he had accomplished nothing. He had, of course, the names of the informers who were acting for Smithshand, but he had also the normal Irishman's dislike of an informer. One. a gnarled old man with a weatherbeaten face, named Joseph Flynn, had a tiny, very isolated cottage at the head of Dunmanus Bay. Brandon hadn't told him that he was from Smithshand, but Flynn had been both friendly and curious when Brandon had spent some hours sitting watching the Atlantic crash up against the brown, craggy shore. It was a beautiful spot and he had thought his explanation that he enjoyed the scenery would be enough for any man. But Flynn had asked questions—perhaps with a view to finding something to report to Smithshand's office. Or perhaps not.

ON THE fourth day something did happen which aroused Brandon's curiosity. He was lying on the moor, several miles from where he had left his car, when a girl and a young man came along. They didn't see him behind a clump of heather and they sat down, evidently continuing a conversation which had been going on for some time.

"—and he said he didn't want me to have anything to do with the local people," the young man was saying with a marked English accent.

"If he hates us so much, the old curmudgeon, why doesn't he go back to England and live there?" said the girl.

"I don't know." The man sounded harried and nervous. "But we must be careful, Mary."

"Arrah, go on with you! Suppose you did lose your job, isn't there plenty of work for a man that's strong and willing?"

"Not for me."

"And why not?"

"I told you, I'm a foreigner here. Besides—"

"Besides what? It's always half sentences you're saying and then not explaining. It's not that you're afraid of the old curmudgeon, is it Tom?" There was silence. "But what can he do to you?"

"Let's not talk about it. It's too nice a day to spoil. The first day the sun's come out this week. Come on. Let's go up to the point." He pulled the girl to her feet and their voices died away.

Brandon watched them thoughtfully and waited until they were well out of sight before he lighted a cigarette. The young man sounded English, and looked healthy, so why wasn't he in the Army or in a job in England? Who was "the old curmudgeon" and why did he hate the Irish and yet live in Ireland, hire English help and not want them to have anything to do with the local people? Probably the youth would turn out to be tubercular and the old man a harmless eccentric.

However, Brandon decided to play his hunch and, returning to his car, drove around by a circuitous route until he came to the road leading down from the point. There he stopped, got out, lifted the hood and detached a sparkplug. Then he lighted a cigarette and sat on the running board and waited, the sparkplug and an oily rag in his hand. He had smoked four cigarettes and carefully disposed of all the butts, out of sight, before the sound of feet displacing some stones on the steep hill made him hurriedly put his head down into the engine again. It was the girl, and alone now. He looked up as she came level and said, "Good day." She acknowledged his greeting gravely and stood watching him with steady blue eyes.

"If you wait a minute, I'll drive you wherever you're going," he said.

She gave a low, mischievous laugh and pushed the black hair back from her forehead. "And maybe it would be sooner home that I'd be if I walked," she said.

"Don't think much of me as a mechanic?" Brandon grinned at her and replaced the sparkplug that he had removed. He closed the hood and said, "D'you want to bet?" He climbed under the wheel and turned the engine over a couple of times, then pushed the door open. "Get in."

"It is a beautiful car," she said slowly, "but I don't know whether I should be riding with a stranger."

"In the middle of the afternoon it's all right," he said. "Where do you want to go?"

"To the head of the bay." She hesitated again with her foot on the running board, the blue eyes grave and searching. "You will be after taking me straight home?"

"If you want me to." He looked directly at her and the curious light gray eyes that had baffled and frightened so many people seemed to satisfy her.

"It will be all right to ride with you, dark man," she said and got in.

MICHAEL BRANDON

He drove slowly and for a few minutes didn't speak. Then he said, "Didn't I see you up on the point a little time back with a young man?"

It brought a quick frown of anxiety to her smooth forehead. "Did you see me? I thought we—" She broke off.

"You thought nobody was around. Didn't you want to be seen? Because I don't count." He smiled reassuringly. "I'm nobody."

"My grandfather would be displeased."

"Who is your grandfather?"

"You were talking to him yesterday."

"Joseph Flynn? Now what would he be keeping you hidden for? If I had a beautiful granddaughter like you, I'd want to show her off to everyone."

"You make fun of me."

BRANDON shook his head and dug cigarettes from his pocket, slowing down the car as he lit one. "Why wouldn't your grandfather approve of the young man? He looked a likely enough chap."

"He is English."

"And doesn't your grandfather like the English?"

"He won't even allow them to be mentioned. Because of my father," she added.

"What happened?"

"It was during the trouble in '20. Mother and father lived in Cork. One Sunday morning they arrested a lot of people outside the cathedral and among them, my father. The truck that was taking the prisoners to be examined was ambushed by our men and rather than lose their prisoners, the soldiers shot them. My father was killed. The shock was too much for my mother and she died a week later, when I was born, God rest her soul. So my grandfather fetched me out here and has brought me up."

Brandon said, "I see," and his mind was working fast. All that Smithshand's dossier of Joseph Flynn had said was that he lived with an orphan granddaughter; someone had slipped somewhere. He went on, "And the boy I saw on the point with you is English?"

The girl nodded. "He works for Sir Robert Morrell."

"Oh, the one who has the old Blennerhasset house?"

"Yes. You know him?"

"No, but someone mentioned that he bought the place. I used to know it in old Blennerhasset's time." They were getting very near the little cottage at the head of the bay. "What's Morrell like?" he asked carelessly.

"I have only seen him but once, riding by in his car. And him living here these eight years. An old man and looking careworn. Everyone seems to be afraid of him."

"I wonder why."

But he wasn't destined to get an answer to that, for Joseph Flynn was standing outside his cottage. Brandon handed the girl out and, rightly appraising the somewhat annoyed look in the old man's rheumy eyes, took the offensive. "I hope you'll forgive my introducing myself to Miss Flynn. I met her a way up the road."

"She has duties that should be keeping her busy instead of traipsing about all over the country," said the old man, not too graciously. "But she's young and there's not much for the young people here. They all leave and go to America."

"Not so many of them now, grandfather," protested the girl. "Have you been to America, Mr. Brandon?"

"I was there some years ago."

"You might be offering Mr. Brandon a dish of tea, Mary, with him kind enough to drive you home," Flynn said.

Brandon thanked him and went into the spotlessly clean cottage. He watched the girl set cups out and place the kettle, which had been standing at the side of the stove, back over the coals.

"Do you think I should like America, Mr. Brandon?" she said after a while.

"It would depend. If you went to good friends, or to relatives, I expect you'd be happy. Otherwise, it's not an easy country to get along in."

The old man had gone outside again, momentarily. She watched him through the open door and then said, "And if later it were to be that I should marry and go?"

Brandon smiled a trifle, and for a moment pain shadowed the gray eyes. "If you love the man, child, any country where he is will be heaven."

She looked at him for a moment and nodded.

"Is it strong you take your tea or weak, like the English, you having lived amongst them?"

"Strong and brewed." He watched Flynn coming slowly in.

"Perhaps if Mr. Brandon isn't busy and feels like it, he might drive you over to Cork tomorrow night for the picture you've been talking so much about, Mary," suggested Flynn a little later.

"But, Grandfather—" The girl looked surprised and embarrassed. "Mr. Brandon wouldn't want to be going to the city, with himself come here for a rest."

"He seems to drive all over the country," growled Flynn.

"Would you care to go, Miss Flynn?" asked Brandon.

"I wouldn't put you to the trouble."

"It would be a pleasure," Brandon answered gravely. He took his leave a little later, arranging to pick the girl up at half past five the following day. She went out to the car with him and stood fiddling with the handle of the door.

"I don't want to be a trouble to you," she said at last, without looking at him.

He tilted her face up gently. "You would never be a trouble to anyone, child," he said. Then after a moment's pause he continued, "This English boy. Perhaps he could get the evening off and meet us somewhere along the road?"

Her blue eyes lit up. "And wouldn't that be grand! But are you sure—"

"Can he drive a car?"

"He's been a mechanic. Why would you be asking?"

"Just a thought that struck me. You see if you can get hold of him and tell him to meet us somewhere."

CHAPTER II

THE GO-BETWEEN

AS HE turned the car, Brandon found himself wishing he knew a little more about Sir Robert Morrell, and trying to piece together the bits of information that he had. Sir Robert had made his money manufacturing army boots in Northampton during the last war and had been knighted for patriotic services which Brandon vaguely recollected consisted of a large donation to the Red Cross at the right moment. He lived at Blennerhasset House with his wife and her invalid uncle, who never went out. He kept a large number of servants, mostly men, and they spent their time preparing the grounds for landscape gardening. It was not very useful information.

He had to pass the Blennerhasset House and, as the gate was open, he turned into the drive. A powerfully-built butler came to the door and

MARY FLYNN

he sent his name in. A few seconds later an elderly man, whom he had no difficulty in recognizing from Mary Flynn's description, came out. Sir Robert Morrell certainly looked thin and careworn. He greeted his visitor with a booming voice and a bluff heartiness which were at odds with his appearance. Brandon explained that he had known the place well as a boy, had been passing and had a nostalgic urge to see it again.

"Very glad you did. You're one of the Brandons of Hill House, eh? Heard a lot about the family. Fine lot of men. All fighting."

The inflection of the sentence said, "And why aren't you?" but Brandon ignored it. He said rather flatly, "I'm the last of them. My three brothers are dead."

"Last of the line, eh? Too bad. Hate to see old families die out. Unless you've got sons? No? Not married? Too bad. You've time yet, eh? Come in. I want you to meet my wife."

The brief glance that Brandon had of the hall and the drawing room into which he was ushered, showed him that the place had been completely changed since the days when he had been a visitor there. It appeared to have been interior-decorated within an inch of its life. Not that there was anything particularly wrong with the decorations as such. In another house they might have looked very well, but they were out of place in a stone house with all the beauty of an old castle—which, indeed, it once had been. All the beauty, reflected Brandon, and all the discomfort. But then the Blennerhassets had never had the money to put in improvements. Probably Morrell had placed bathrooms in the old cannon emplacements and an elevator shaft in the keep, not to mention an electric laundry in the dungeon. A short, stocky woman was rising from a rectangular modern

settee and coming towards him. Lady Morrell gave him a friendly greeting, said they were just about to have tea, or would he care for something stronger?

"Join me in a whiskey," boomed Sir Robert. "One of the few things to be said for this benighted country, they do make good whiskey. I hear you can hardly get it in London now."

The conversation was inconsequential small talk. Morrell had bought the place in 1935 and redecorated and had various improvements put in. "I wonder that Lady Morrell was willing to bury herself in such a desolate spot," said Brandon pleasantly.

"English taxes, my dear fellow! Couldn't cope with 'em. And one didn't have to be a prophet to see they were going to get worse each year, and now look at 'em! Not that the taxes aren't bad enough here these days." Brandon agreed politely and Morrell went on. "Otherwise we'd never put up with it. But needs must when the devil drives. Damned unfriendly crew they are 'round here. Always whispering together in groups, talking their damned Gaelic gibberish. It's a mystery to me why anyone ever thought the Irish a friendly people. Damned if it isn't a mystery."

"You seem to have a local mystery, by the way," said Brandon. "Man who owns the hotel in Bantry was telling me that the chap who had my room before me went out one day and never was seen again."

"I heard about it. D'you know what I think?" Morrell looked conspiratorial. "I think he was a Nazi spy."

"Good God! Why?" Brandon's surprise flattered Morrell's opinion of himself as a raconteur.

"The fellow appears out of the nowhere, registers at the hotel, goes around asking a lot of questions, then suddenly disappears. What else could he be?"

"What kind of questions did he ask?"

"Oh—about the local police and what they did, and whether any of the special police from Dublin had been around here and whether any strangers had been around recently. I ask you, what else could he be?"

"Might be a criminal on the run," suggested Brandon.

"Bah!" There was utter contempt in his voice. "He was a Nazi. The country is crawling with 'em."

"If you really believe that, you should report it to Dublin."

"And have a knife sunk in my back next time I go out? Matter of fact, I did try to call their attention to something once, and all I got was a letter two weeks later saying that they wanted to thank me, but they had investigated the matter thoroughly and I had been misinformed. Misinformed, my eye! They're just working hand in glove with them."

"Now Robert, I don't think that's quite fair," protested his wife. "They may be lax and stupid, but I don't think they help them."

"Maybe the government doesn't, but certainly all these dirty peasants do. They'd help anybody against England, even an armada of cannibals!"

When Brandon left a little later, they cordially invited him to return. He was very thoughtful as he drove slowly back on to the road, and he didn't turn towards Bantry but drove into Cork and parked his car on Morrison's Quay. Then he walked to Moore's Hotel across the street and asked for Mr. Farrel.

PROMPTLY at half past five the next day, Brandon slid the car to a halt in front of Joseph Flynn's cottage and the old man came out. "Mary's fussing with her hair or her dress," he said, "but she won't be keeping you waiting more than a minute. I'm thinking it's right kind of you to take the child and give her a bit of pleasure."

The girl herself appeared in the doorway in a plain dark blue dress whose trim white collar and cuffs made her look less than her twenty-four years. She had a coat on her arm, and as she came forward she gave a little tug to her straw hat.

"You've been fussing with that hat all day," her grandfather chided, half seriously.

"I don't want to be shaming Mr. Brandon, even though I know Cork isn't London."

"You wouldn't shame any man, in London or anywhere else." Brandon told her. "I'll bring her back safe to you, Flynn, and not too late."

"And you needn't be breaking your neck to hurry back, Mr. Brandon. I know it's in good hands she is."

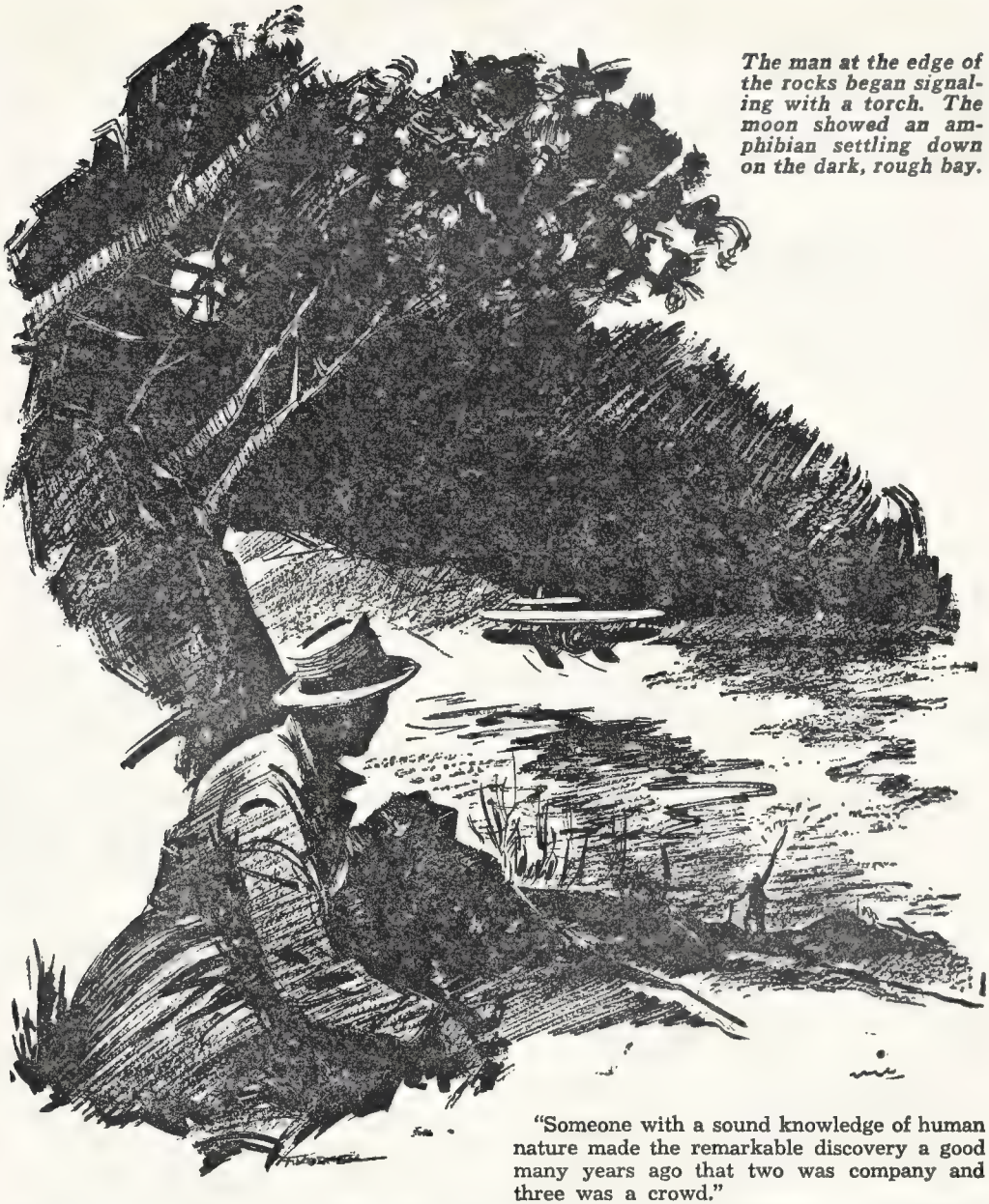
Mary seemed very preoccupied as he turned the car back on to the main road. "It's so unlike grandfather," she confided. "I mean, he quite seemed to want me to go."

Brandon had his own theories about that, but he didn't intend to express them. He said, "Did you manage to get word to the boy?"

"Tom will be waiting by the turn to the Mallow road." She blushed a little as she answered.

In less than five minutes they reached the turn and the young man stepped from the side of the road. Brandon hadn't been able to get a good look at him the day before and now he studied him with interest. He was very blond and fair-skinned and his sensitive face was taut and fine-drawn, with lines of strain around the mouth and haggard, haunted blue eyes. He was definitely suspicious. He responded to Mary's shy "This is Tom Judson" with a rather hostile "Mary told me about you." He paused a second, then went on with what was evidently a rehearsed speech. "It's very kind of you to take us into Cork, but I don't quite understand why."

Brandon looked him over deliberately with a half smile. "For some quite inexplicable rea-



The man at the edge of the rocks began signaling with a torch. The moon showed an amphibian settling down on the dark, rough bay.

son, Miss Flynn seems to like you," he said lightly, "and I thought it would please her."

"Well, it's very kind of you—" Judson repeated dubiously.

"She also said you can drive a car." Brandon got out and stood in the road. "Get in, Judson. The tank is full of petrol." He slipped a couple of bills into the young man's hand. "Take her to dinner at the Metropole. You'll have time before the picture starts. And see that she gets home safe, by midnight."

"But I don't understand—" began Judson.

"Someone with a sound knowledge of human nature made the remarkable discovery a good many years ago that two was company and three was a crowd."

"But Mr. Brandon, suppose my grandfather should see me come back with Tom?" Mary said worriedly.

"Get out at the top of the path down to your cottage, the excuse being that it would be difficult to turn the car in the dark. Then leave the car at the Vickers for me, Judson."

"But I can't take your money," protested Tom.

"You're taking my place as host." Brandon gave a half smile. "I came by it honestly. The only thing I do ask, Tom, is this: Take her to

dinner and the picture and straight home. I'm responsible for her, you know."

Mary rushed to the defense. "Why, Mr. Brandon, Tom wouldn't be thinking of anything else! But it's sorry we both are that you won't be with us."

"I'll bring her straight home, sir, and thanks."

"Right, children. Go along and enjoy yourselves."

He watched the car disappear, but he didn't start down the road that would have taken him to Bantry. Instead, he cut across the moor. He walked pretty steadily for nearly an hour until he came to the crest of the hill overlooking Dunmanus Bay, then made for a group of big brown boulders and lay down behind them. He could watch Flynn's cottage and observe who came in and out.

For several hours there was nothing to observe—at least, nothing in the way of human life. There was a magnificent sunset over the Atlantic. The gold and red light reflected on the white breakers and strong brown rocks made a picture that would have been utterly satisfying to any artist, and normally Brandon would have been perfectly content to lie there and watch it and do nothing; for like all Irishmen, he could do nothing beautifully. But tonight it only made him angry and restless. He had such a deep native loyalty to Eire that he had once jeopardized his whole army career by flatly refusing an assignment during the trouble in 1920. And now, he argued, the country had a perfect right to remain neutral if she saw fit and he bitterly resented people who used that neutrality as a shield for espionage activities.

Besides, it was getting cold and somewhat damp and he knew that before long it would be a good deal damper, and a feeling of damp cold does not arouse one's artistic instincts. So he scowled at the sunset and rarely took his eyes from Flynn's cottage for longer than was necessary to scan the moor behind him. Dusk fell, and with the approaching dark he left the shelter of the rocks and, carefully keeping under cover, advanced down to the slope just behind the cottage. There, for nearly an hour through the long twilight, he lay flat. Not until it was completely dark did he take a chance on sitting up.

He wanted very much to smoke but knew he couldn't, and instead ate a piece of the chocolate he had brought along in his pocket. Though he was quite aware of the food value of chocolate, Brandon didn't like it, and by ten o'clock his never very certain temper was frankly bad.

Various old injuries were starting to ache because of the damp and he wished fervently that he had paid more attention to the doctor who had told him to remain a week longer in the hospital, and less attention to Smithshand's pleas.

BY ELEVEN o'clock he was cursing himself and deciding his hunch had been wrong. He'd wait until midnight, he thought, or at any rate until he saw the girl come home. Then the cabin door opened. It was only a darker shadow among dark shadows, for the light inside had been extinguished. A shadow which must be Joseph Flynn moved out to the edge of the rocks and stood very still there. At the same time, Brandon detected the distant hum of an airplane motor above the crashing of the surf. It grew louder. The dark shadow that was Joseph Flynn began signaling with a torch. The plane was overhead now. Two flares dropped. The moon, struggling from behind a bank of clouds, showed an amphibian settling on the uneven water of the bay. For an instant Brandon was lost in admiration for the sheer skill and guts of the pilot who could make a landing among those murderous rocks in the dark.

With incredible speed, a rubber boat was being launched from the plane. Almost before the solitary occupant could start to wield the paddle to get clear, the plane was taxiing around, ready to take off. Brandon watched the tiny boat. Flynn was holding the torch steady now, as a beacon to guide the man rowing. Brandon knew there was one spot, just below where Flynn was standing, where you could bring in a boat without being dashed to pieces against the rocks. He slipped from his hiding place into the shadow of the wall of the cottage. Flynn was going forward with what looked like a boathook in his other hand. Brandon hadn't long to wait. He heard foosteps scrambling up the steep trail, then Flynn's voice saying, "Better be minding where you put your feet."

A strange voice replied in perfect English, "You know where to take me?"

Then Flynn again, rather shortly, "Sure and isn't that what I'm paid for?"

"Then let's not waste any time."

They didn't come up the path to the cottage but hit off directly for the road. Brandon dared not follow along the road for he knew that his steps on the loose stones would give him away at once. Cursing the moon, which had now decided to emerge completely from the clouds, he stumbled along the moor, keeping some fifteen feet from the road. Less than half a mile from the cottage, a man in a trenchcoat with the collar turned up and the brim of his hat pulled down, stepped forward from the shadows. Evidently Flynn expected him, for he waved an unenthusiastic kind of a greeting and Brandon was just near enough to hear him say, "Here's your man," rather sullenly.

"Here's your money," responded the newcomer, and something passed between them. "Good night. I'll get in touch with you when we need you again. It may be soon."

Flynn said good night, turned on his heel and

started back. The man who had been landed began to speak, but the trenchcoated one said, "Sh! May as well be sure he's out of earshot." He spoke in German.

Brandon had fallen flat on his face while Flynn went by but he needn't have bothered, for the old man walked with his head down and his eyes on the road as if the whole transaction had been distasteful to him. The other two hadn't moved from their spot. When Flynn had finally disappeared around the bend, the trenchcoat said, "Safe now, I expect. Come on." And they started to walk briskly.

Brandon continued his dodging and stumbling. Once his foot dislodged a stone which bumped down the grass over some rocks and on to the road and for a minute he froze and held his breath. But though the trenchcoated one frequently looked back, the slight noise, if they heard it, didn't arouse their suspicions. Then they turned left by a thick clump of gorse bushes.

As Brandon flopped prone once more, he saw a car parked there. He lifted his head cautiously and watched them both get in. Then he heard the starter.

The car would have to back past him before it could start up the road unless it were going to return in the direction of Flynn's cabin, which seemed unlikely. He couldn't see the number and reflected irritably that it wouldn't do him much good if he could, here. By the time he got through the red tape necessary to have the owner checked on through the proper channels in Dublin, the war would probably be over—and the need for speed had been Smithshand's main reason for dragging him out of the hospital.

Colonel Smithshand was always in a hurry when he sent for him, he thought irrelevently. Some years before he had told the colonel he wished that just once they would send for him at the beginning of a job and not at the last minute when several other men had failed and the situation was urgent; the implied compliment of always being used as a last desperate hope didn't appeal to his pragmatic mind. The jobs were always much harder after other men had tried and failed.

The car was backing on to the road. He scrambled down the bank and crouched in the shelter of the gorse bushes. It backed some four feet too far, passing him, and he remained perfectly still. In the night quiet he heard the gear shift, then car moved forward with a slight jerk. He ran and caught something on the back, gave a rather lopsided jump and found his foot had some hold. It was a luggage rack. He hoped it was strapped up firmly and felt it give a little as they swerved round a bend in the road.

After that he had opportunity to think of nothing except the business of maintaining his precarious hold.

CHAPTER III

LADY MORRELL'S UNCLE

HE thought they were turning north at the fork of the Mallow road, but he couldn't be quite sure. His muscles ached and there seemed to be a great many petrol fumes escaping from somewhere just under his nose. The roads in Kerry aren't the best in the world even if you're sitting conventionally inside a car on good springs; this way they felt like a test course for tanks.

Then, just as Brandon was beginning to wonder whether his muscles were becoming paralyzed or whether he was getting doped by the fumes, a swerve that nearly threw him off told him that they had turned in somewhere. A gate was closing behind them. He knew a moment of panic wondering whether the man working the gate would notice him, then realized that it must have been operated from the small lodge. There was something familiar about the sweep of the drive. Suddenly he knew his hunch had been right. It was Sir Robert Morrell's drive.

As soon as he thought he was out of sight of anyone who might have been watching from the gatekeeper's lodge, he jumped, missed his footing and landed with a jolt in the road. He picked himself up and ran for the shelter of the elms which lined the drive. For a few minutes he leaned against the nearest tree, resting his aching muscles. He'd confirmed his hunch but he'd need something a lot more definite than that to present to Dublin if he wanted to get swift action. He heard a dog bark somewhere and frowned. Dogs wouldn't help matters.

He had better get a little farther from the drive, in case someone came back along it. He took a few steps through the rather long grass. It did not appear to be trimmed, except on the narrow strip between the elms and the road. The next second he knew why it wasn't trimmed. His left foot went down, and there was a click and an excruciating pain in his ankle. He had stumbled into a trap. It had thrown him forward onto his face and now he scrambled into a sitting position and hunched himself forward so that he could get his hands on it.

He worked swiftly in a cold fury mostly directed at himself for not having realized that they would have the place protected in some such way. His searching fingers had found the spring and he forced the jaws apart and drew his foot out. For a minute after the jagged teeth were removed, the pain was worse and he wiped sweat from his face before he gingerly felt the ankle. It wasn't broken, his fingers told him. He struggled up and tentatively put his weight on the left leg. It hurt abominably but it held him.

Brandon shot the first animal as she sprang, but the second one was too quick for him.

Then he heard shouting from the top of the drive and again the barking of dogs. The trap had been wired to some mechanism that had sounded an alarm in the house. He made for the strip of trimmed grass along the road, limping painfully, but before he had gone thirty yards, he knew that there was no hope of getting out through the main gate unobserved. Men's voices and more barking of dogs were coming from that direction as well. The chances were that there would be fewer men at the lodge than at the main house. He might be able to shoot his way through if there were only one or two men with a couple of dogs. He realized the slenderness of the chance, but as there was no other possibility, he went ahead. Once his eyes peered up in the hope of seeing a tree with a low branch, but the stalwart elms that had seen many generations come and go offered him no comfort.

Then swiftly he slipped behind one of them, standing close against the gnarled trunk, hardly breathing. Two men were striding up from the gate abreast of each other, one on either side of the road, and each carried a shotgun. The barks he had heard were from mastiffs.

For a minute he hoped they might pass him, then one of the dogs growled. The man nearest Brandon stopped. "Pharos has got something."

"That bitch is no good," said the other man. "It'll be a rabbit."

Then the other dog growled.

"I tell you, she has got something."

"All right, all right. Let her loose."

Brandon held his gun in his hand. He still had a hundred-to-one chance—the chance that the dog might have been growling at something else or that she might catch herself in one of the traps. Then he saw the great mastiff. She was well-trained and didn't leave the strip of trimmed grass. As unerringly as if she were a bloodhound, she made for the tree where he stood. The other brute was less than a second behind and their deep-throated growls were raised in unison.

"Get him, Pharos! Get him, Celt!" the men's voices called.

Brandon shot the first animal as she sprang, but the second was too quick for him. He swerved, throwing up his left arm to protect his throat, and felt the teeth pierce his trenchcoat and jacket, into his shoulder. The weight of the brute carried him down and he heard a man's voice say, "Drop that gun," just as his head crashed against something.

The next thing he knew, he was propped against the tree and four pairs of legs were standing round him—one booted pair, one in ancient gaiters and two in ordinary trousers. Someone was holding a light.

"But that's what I'm after telling ye. I didn't do a thing to the man. He shot Pharos and Celt jumped him and sure it must have been the way he fell."

"He's coming 'round," said another voice.

"Get him on his feet and bring him up to the house."

The gaitered legs and the booted ones moved toward him. Brandon let himself be hauled up. One of the other men said, "Walk, pig, unless you want to be kicked."

Brandon obeyed. He hadn't said one word and, for the present, he thought it just as well not to. He stumbled a bit as he walked. His ankle was increasingly painful and his shoulder hurt. Only his thick clothes had saved him from much worse from the teeth of the mastiff, he knew.

UNOBTRUSIVELY he took stock of the men on either side of him. Both were elderly, one short and square-shouldered, with shifty eyes, the other taller and with a long nose. They took him through the great hall to a room at the back which he vaguely recollected had once been the "morning room."

Brandon's two guards shoved him unceremoniously through the doorway. The other two men who had walked behind them all the way up the drive had come in now, and for the first time he got a good look at them. Both were young and wore impeccably tailored flannels. There the resemblance ended. One was dark almost to the point of being swarthy, with a beaked nose and full, rather red lips under a thin moustache, while the other was fair, thin-lipped, blue-eyed and monocled.

"All right. You two get back to the gate," the fair one ordered the other two men, then came over to Brandon, a gun in his hand.

"Now. What were you doing?"

"Taking a shortcut across the grounds. Got my foot stuck in a trap, then a couple of dogs attacked me," answered Brandon laconically.

"D'you expect us to believe that?" demanded the dark one, and there was a faint trace of a German accent in his speech.

"Not particularly. It's the best I can think of at the moment."

"Keep him covered while I get his papers, Miller," said the dark one. "Take that coat off."

So Miller was the fair one's name. Brandon obeyed and took off the trenchcoat. He winced a little as he got his left arm out and Miller smiled unpleasantly. "Good teeth, those dogs, haven't they?"

"Excellent, I should say," Brandon agreed.

The dark one came over and went through his pockets, piling everything onto a desk. He looked at the Cork garage bill. "So, your name is Brandon."

"Brandon," repeated Miller. "Then that's the fellow who was here yesterday afternoon. You remember, Fruehler. Morrell was talking about him at dinner. Another damned spy. You'd better go and tell the chief."

The one called Fruehler nodded and hurried out of the room. Brandon considered the gun in Miller's hand and decided that, in view of the dogs, traps, and men with shotguns outside, the risk of tackling him was not justified. In the first place Miller looked as if he both could and would use the gun, and in the second, Brandon didn't feel at the moment as if he could win a battle over an undernourished rabbit. He wanted very much to sit down and, as there was a chair quite near him, he sat.

"Who told you you could sit down?" barked Miller.

"If I fell down, you'd only have to pick me up, you know," Brandon answered amiably. "And I think it's against the law to have dangerous traps in your grounds unless you post adequate warning notices."

"The law isn't going to help you now," said Miller.

"That had occurred to me," agreed Brandon.

Their pleasant little chat was cut short by the return of Fruehler accompanied by Morrell, looking incredibly worried and thinner than ever as he tied the belt of a bathrobe around him. He also looked a little frightened.

"Yes, yes," he said. "It's the same man. One

HERR MILLER

of the Brandons of Hill House." Morrell avoided looking directly at him and Brandon smiled a bit crookedly.

"In avoiding taxes you seem to have run into some other complications, Morrell," he said.

"Shut up. I'll tell you when to talk," said Miller.

Another man was standing in the doorway—a slender, short man of about sixty with absolutely white hair and black eyes; a remarkably long, slim hand rested on a stick. This must be Lady Morrell's allegedly invalid "uncle." He turned his head a trifle and called "Steiner!" sharply, then came slowly into the room. He didn't appear to need the stick, for he carried it about an inch clear of the floor as he walked. Miller and Fruehler had both sprung to attention.

"So. He was quite harmless. Just one of the county people passing by who dropped in." The new arrival dropped the words out acidly, his black eyes resting contemptuously on Morrell.

"But, Herr Grau, his family does live in the neighborhood," Morrell replied, and there was no doubting the fact that he was frightened now. It showed in every accent, in every line of his body. "He said he knew the place as a youngster, which was quite possible."

"You yourself once told me that *all* the Brandons were in the Army or Navy." Grau seated himself with a certain precision at the table and looked Brandon over. "Are you in the British Army?" he asked.

"Yes. I'm on sick leave."

From Grau's expression, Brandon thought he was going to say something witheringly sarcastic, but the butler came in and for the moment diverted his attention. "Bungler!"

"What have I done, sir?" demanded Steiner. As he said it, he was staring at Brandon with a kind of fascinated horror.

"You told me you had arranged that this man should be out of the way tonight," said Grau.

"But I did, sir. Flynn said that—"

"Fruehler, get Flynn," ordered Grau. He turned back to Brandon. "I don't know how the English originally found out that our headquarters were down here. It has been amusing to watch them running stupidly around Dublin for years, looking for them. But since they have suspected it, they have sent three men. They are all dead."

Brandon made no comment, but his dark, lined face set a little and the strange gray eyes were hard. Ted Ferguson had had a wife and boy, and a new baby he'd never seen.

Grau waited, but when he saw that his prisoner wasn't going to answer, he went on. "You have been the cleverest, so far. But it won't help you now."

THE butler had recovered a little from his fascinated horror. "I don't understand, sir. Flynn told me that he had seen this man leave for Cork with his daughter and that he was sure he suspected nothing and that he wouldn't be back until midnight or later."

"He obviously isn't in Cork now, idiot!" snapped Grau, and once again turned to Brandon. "So Mary Flynn is doing a little spying for the English."

Brand shook his head. "Mary Flynn knew nothing about it."

"Another likely story!" Grau was silent for a moment, tapping his stick on the floor. "What did you do, bribe her to lie to her grandfather?"

"I fetched her in my car. I knew she had somebody she is in love with and I told her that if he could drive, he could have the car and take her into Cork."

"You're lying."

"Not about that," said Brandon steadily.

Grau suddenly brought the stick down with a bang on the floor. "Where's that deserter, Judson?"

"He came in less than five minutes ago, sir. He had the evening off and went into Bantry with Partridge and Smith. You said they could take the Austin," replied Steiner.

"Get them here. All of them."

There was complete silence until Steiner reappeared, followed by Judson and two other men, neither of whom would have won prizes for their beauty or honesty of countenance. Judson's start of horror when he saw Brandon must have been obvious to the densest onlooker.

"Where have you been, Judson?" demanded Grau.

"To Bantry, sir. I had the evening off."

"Haven't you learned yet that it doesn't pay to lie to me? You were with Mary Flynn, weren't you?" Judson shot Brandon a look which was half accusation and half terror. "As

a matter of fact, he didn't tell me," Grau continued unpleasantly. "But I remembered I had to warn you about her before." He turned to the other two. "Judson was with Mary Flynn, wasn't he?"

Partridge and Smith nearly fell over themselves to explain that they had no idea where he had been. He had started in to Bantry with them and dropped off near the Mallow road, saying he had a girl somewhere and that he'd meet them in Bantry at a quarter to twelve and to be sure not to leave without him. He'd been there at a quarter to twelve and that was all they knew. As soon as he'd got their story, Grau dismissed them.

"Now." He looked at Judson.

"All right. I did go into Cork with the girl. This fellow was taking her out and he told her to invite me along. And when I met them, he said I should take her and bring her home and leave his car for him." Judson blurted it out rather desperately.

"I warned you before about Mary Flynn." There was something deadly under the soft tone. "She is an English spy."

"She is nothing of the kind," said Brandon.

"She gave you the information that brought you here."

"No."

"We will soon find out . . . Miller, Steiner!"

"Get up," ordered Miller.

Before Brandon was clear of the chair, Miller hit him on the side of the head with the gun. Steiner drove a savage right into his belly. Brandon tried to fend off the blows, but both of them could slug and both were fresh. Steiner kicked his injured ankle and he went down.

Miller put his gun away and hauled him to his feet. He drove his right with vicious power to Brandon's head, while the left crashed into his mouth.

Brandon reeled back against a table for support and brought up his right in a blow to Miller's midriff that surprised him. But Steiner was closing in again. With the deadly precision and pile-driving force of a professional fighter, he landed blow after blow. Brandon slumped to the floor.

Miller hauled him up.

"Mary Flynn was in this with you?"

"No," said Brandon.

Miller hit him viciously across the mouth. "She was paid by the English?"

Brand spat out blood and said, "No."

Miller hit him again and his body sagged. Miller let him go and he slid to the floor.

His next sensation was of drowning and he knew someone had splashed water over his head. Then Miller was dragging him to his feet again, but he couldn't even try to fend off the blows now. And again he slid down.

Coming to after another interval of blankness, Brandon heard a voice choked with rage shouting, "The dirty, lying Sassenach! I'll kill

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him with me bare hands. Let me at him!" and he came to painful consciousness to see Joseph Flynn's face glaring above him, with Fruehler's hands restraining the old man from making an immediate effort to carry out his threat. "What did you do with my girl?"

"She got back all right, didn't she?" asked Brandon thickly.

"She got back. But where had she been?"

"In Cork. Seeing the picture."

"Enough of this nonsense. It doesn't matter where the girl had been," Grau's voice cut in. "We'll find that out from her tomorrow."

"But you can't do that! I won't have her knowing—" began Flynn.

"Be quiet." Grau stood thoughtfully beside Brandon, tapping the stick a little on the ground. "Have you changed your mind? Are you ready to tell us?"

"The girl had nothing to do with the whole thing," said Brandon.

"D'you want Miller to make you talk?" asked Grau.

"She still had nothing to do with it."

"Shall I take him?" asked Miller.

Grau shook his head. "He's not in very good shape. And I want him alive when we get the girl up here."

"I won't let you bring my girl up here!" shouted Flynn.

"You're going to stay here until we fetch her. Then you can go."

"I'll go to the police."

"Not if you want to see her again," said Grau quietly. "Miller, take Brandon downstairs and tie him up. We'll deal with him when we get the girl."

"On your feet, pig," said Miller and emphasized the command with a kick on Brandon's ankle. "Steiner, get some rope and bring it down."

CHAPTER IV

THE WELL

THEY had tied his wrists behind his back to a ring in the wall, and they had tied them too tight. At the end of an hour of futile struggling, Brandon ruefully conceded that they knew their business and had made a good job of it; he couldn't free himself. He tried to find a position which would ease his shoulder, but didn't succeed in that, either. He was, he knew, in the old wine cellar. A lamp had been left standing on a bracket by the door, and he could see the empty bins and shelves.

Well, when he didn't show up, Farrell would get the information he had given him to Smithshand. It might give them enough to work on so that the next man would be able to finish the job. For Brandon had no illusions about his captors' plans for him. He didn't even mind very much; all he hoped was that it would be quick.

There was a slight noise as if the latch on the outside of the door at the top of the cellar stairs was being raised cautiously, then silence. He wondered if his hearing was playing him tricks. Then when he'd about decided that it was, Tom Judson appeared, his shoes in his hand.

"I think I'm going to kill you," he said very quietly. In a matter-of-fact way he put his shoes down on the paved floor and came over.

"If you wait a little while, your pals will save you the trouble," answered Brandon, with a short laugh.

"You won't laugh when I choke the breath out of your rotten carcass." Judson grabbed his throat. The movement wrenched Brandon's shoulder, bringing a film of sweat to his face.

Through stiff lips he said, "It's no great trick to kill a man whose hands are tied behind him."

"And you won't fool me into freeing you, either," said Judson.

"Why d'you want to kill me?" asked Brandon. "I didn't get you into trouble with your friends. I hadn't mentioned you. You blurted out the whole story yourself. It's not my fault if you tell everything you know."

"It doesn't matter what happens to me. But you dragged Mary into the mess."

"I tried my best to keep her out."

"You tried! You deliberately endangered her. Why, you—"

"Listen to me a minute," interrupted Brandon. "Old Flynn actually asked me to take Mary into Cork tonight. It isn't a thing a man like Flynn would normally ask a man like me. I had to know why he was so damned anxious to get me out of the way. I told her to ask you because I thought she'd like it. Otherwise, I'd have hired a driver and sent her in to dinner with some friends of mine in Cork. If I hadn't been such a damn fool as to get caught, no one would have been any wiser."

"Well, you *have* got her into it, whether you meant to or not."

"I tried my best to clear her. I'm sorry."

"What's the use of your being sorry? You'd no right—"

"The things we fight for, Tom, and our duty to them are bigger than ourselves or our feelings. Bigger than you or me or Mary."

"It's easy for you to talk. She's not your girl."

For a moment Brandon looked at him, then he said slowly, "There was a woman once. I watched them shoot her. I could have saved her, but I had a job to do."

"A woman you loved?" queried Judson incredulously.

"I loved her." He could still see the bright splash of color that Andrée's copper-colored hair had made on the wet courtyard after the machine guns had done their work.

Judson stared into his gaunt, drawn face and into the queer gray eyes and after a long pause, muttered, "Well, I'll be eternally damned."

"You probably will," said Brandon, matter-of-factly. "Now, instead of trying to kill me, you'd be much smarter if you'd help me."

"I can't."

"Why not?"

"Didn't they tell you? I'm a deserter," he said bitterly.

"What happened?" asked Brandon.

"I just couldn't take it. I was through Dunkerque and then Africa. I got a leave finally, and all the time I kept having nightmares about going back and lying flat on my belly wondering whether the first goddamned Stuka that came over or the second would get me and seeing men with their brains scattered all over the ground or their guts hanging out. And I couldn't face it. I got over here and somehow a fellow in Dublin found out and said he knew a man who'd help me and sent me down here. I didn't know what I was getting into till it was too late. I can't go back. I still see it in my nightmares. It's got so I'm scared to go to sleep."

"You never solve anything by running away from it, boy. If you're afraid of something and run away from it, you'll always have it with you. And you're not helping things by being a traitor to your own country."

"I didn't want to be."

"If you don't want to be, now's the time to show it."

"They'd send me back."

Brandon could see the shadow of horror in the boy's harrassed eyes. Judson was quite obviously one of those for whom the strain of modern warfare was too much. He needed a psychiatrist. "No hell can be worse than the one you've made for yourself, Tom," he said steadily. "You're getting a second chance. Not everyone does."

For a long time the boy's struggle was apparent. His eyes desperately searched the older man's face as though he sought to borrow courage from him. At last he set his mouth and said, "What d'you want me to do?"

"Cut me loose, to start with."

Tom obeyed without further question. The sudden release from the strained position, combined with the circulation of the blood through his numbed hands, made Brandon's senses reel. He lurched forward and felt Judson catch him.

HE realized he was propped up against Tom's knee when he opened his eyes and looked into the boy's comically surprised and worried face. He tried to sit up a bit more and winced as he moved his left shoulder. "I'll be all right in a minute."

"Why didn't you tell me they'd tied you like that?" Tom was looking at the trickle of blood from Brandon's cut wrists. A few seconds later he said, "But you can't get out. The kitchen door is padlocked and it's wired to the electric alarms that are on all the windows. Steiner is guarding the front door and he has a gun. And you couldn't get through the grounds anyway, even if you could get out of the house."

"Can you leave?" asked Brandon.

"No."

"Is old Flynn still here?"

"Locked in a room and calling on God to get him out of the mess he's got himself into."

"Did you hear what they plan doing about Mary?"

"Sending a message at about eight o'clock that her grandfather has had an accident and has been brought here. Then they propose letting the old man go and keeping her as hostage for his good behavior."

"That means that they won't hurt her," said Brandon. "How many men are there here?"

"Seven—and the one who arrived last night. That doesn't count Morrell and Grau," said Judson, then added almost carelessly, "They are expecting more."

"When?" asked Brandon sharply.

"Tomorrow—I mean, this morning."

"How d'you know?"

"Men come in every so often to report or something and I heard Steiner saying there had to be food ready for six extra around ten o'clock. And they usually come somewhere around ten."

"That changes everything," muttered Brandon.

He was silent for so long that Judson got restless and finally asked, "What are you going to do?"

"If I show you how to get out of here," said Brandon slowly at last, "will you do what I tell you?"

"If you know a way out, why don't you go yourself, or why don't we both go?"

"Because," explained the older man patiently, "the moment they find I've got away, they'll be warned. They know I'll get in touch with the authorities at once and their game is up. I want them all caught, including those who come at ten. If they find you are missing, they'll just think you've run out, because they know you can't give them away without giving yourself away. They'll bank on that. D'you understand?"

"You want me to go to the authorities?"

"I want you to go to a man you'll find at Moore's Hotel on Morrison's Quay in Cork. Tell him I sent you and tell him the whole story. Everything you know. Holding back nothing. When you've told your story, take your orders from him. Will you do it?"

"They're liable to kill you before ten o'clock," Judson objected.

"Possibly," agreed Brandon.

"And still you're willing to stay?" Judson watched him curiously.

"Suppose you let me worry about myself," said Brandon with a note of impatience. "Will you do it?"

Judsons' harrassed blue eyes looked straight into his gray ones. "Right. What's the name of the man I see?"

"Farrel. James Farrel. Now help me to my feet and I'll show you how to get out." With Judson's aid, he struggled up. "Bring the lamp." As Judson obeyed, he started back through the tangle of cellars. Once he turned and said, "The tide's out, isn't it?"

Tom thought for a moment. "It must be, I guess," he replied, looking rather alarmed.

Brandon smiled a trifle as he stopped. "I haven't taken leave of my senses," he said. "This used to be the old dungeon. There should be a flagstone with a ring in it somewhere."

"There is—over here," announced Judson triumphantly.

"Can you pull it up?"

With something of a struggle, for it was heavy, Judson finally got it up and held the lamp over a dark hole. "It's a well," he announced.

"Lower the lamp and you'll see there isn't more than a foot of water in it at low tide. On one side there's a tunnel that leads out to the shore."

Judson ran back and fetched the rope which had bound Brandon, lowered the lamp on the end of it and peered down. "The water is way down and I can see a sort of hole at the side. How did you know?"

"A great many years ago, old Blennerhasset showed it to me, as a special birthday treat."

Then Tom Judson said the thing he'd been waiting to say. "And Mary. I must warn her."

"Sorry, boy. No."

He started to protest, then looked into the older man's face. The lamp cast strange shadows on its lined pallor. "I suppose if she

weren't there, it would make them suspicious," he said dully. Brandon didn't answer and he said, "All right. Do I just drop down?"

"Not so fast. You've got to tie me up again first. And you can't take the lamp. I saw a stub of candle on one of the shelves in the wine cellar. You can use that."

"I hadn't thought of all that."

"I don't think you'd make a very good conspirator," observed Brandon as he turned back. When he reached the ring in the wall, he said, "Better do it as it was done before, but not so tight." He put his arms behind him and Judson noted the frown of pain and the beads of sweat that started to his forehead.

"It hurts pretty badly, doesn't it?" he asked as he knotted the cord. "Are you sure you won't come with me?"

"Quite sure, and for God's sake, get on!"

For a second the boy hesitated. "I won't let you down, sir," he said, and taking the stub of candle that he had lit, he disappeared in the direction of the old dungeon.

IT ISN'T the easiest thing in the world to let yourself down into a well which has black water at the bottom when you've only another man's say-so that there is less than a foot of water at low tide, and when that say-so is based on a boyhood recollection. Tom couldn't hold the candle in one hand and drop himself down with the other. He had matches in his pocket, so, after surveying the stone sides of the well again, he regretfully blew out the candle and put it in his pocket. He knelt, his hands fumbling for the rim, found it and started to swing his body sideways, then knew a moment of panic and abruptly moved his feet back. He looked at the faint light coming from the wine cellar. The man with the curious gray eyes had known what he might have to face and had made his decision immediately and without fuss and he had trusted Judson. The young man swallowed, for his mouth was dry, and swung his legs over the edge.

For a second he hung, his feet scrambling against the stones for a hold, then he dropped. He stumbled and landed on his knees in water, got up and found that at any rate the first part of Brandon's boyhood recollection had been correct. There wasn't more than a foot of water. He licked his wet hand and found the water was salt. The matches hadn't got wet and he lighted the candle. It flickered and nearly blew out, and he realized the draft was coming from the tunnel which yawned like the Black Hole of Calcutta in front of him. He peered but could see nothing. Shielding the candle with his hand, he plunged forward.

To Tom Judson it semed like years, but was really less than ten minutes before he heard a thudding of surf and saw a spangled patch ahead of him and realized that he was looking at a star-laden sky. He scrambled out into the open and threw himself down on the rocks in the utter exhaustion that is the aftermath of fear. For minutes he gulped in great mouthfuls of air, then he got to his feet and began to climb onto the moor from whence he could reach the road outside the grounds of Blennerhasset House. When he reached the road, he made good time. Only once he stopped, where the path branched off to Flynn's cottage. The temptation to go to Mary was strong. They could go away together and— But what was it Brandon had said? 'You never solve anything by running away.' He plunged on down the Bantry road, and his face was wet with sweat.

Brandon's car was outside Vickers' Hotel, where Judson had left it, the key still in the ignition. He turned it recklessly and probably made something of a record between Bantry and Cork. He told his story, breathlessly and urgently, to a quiet, watchful man of about fifty who sat on the edge of his bed and listened without interrupting and whose pajama leg did not quite conceal one artificial leg. When Tom had quite finished, Jim Farrel started to dress, quickly and efficiently.

"You've got Brandon's car downstairs?" he asked, and when Judson nodded, ran on. "That'll save a few minutes. You'll come with me. You may have to tell your story again."

"But can't we do something?" pleaded Tom. "It's eight now and Mary may—"

"They won't hurt the girl," cut in Farrel impatiently. "They want her for a hostage. It's Brandon I'm worried about."

"He knew what might happen—" said Tom awkwardly.

"Of course he knew. Brandon's no fool and he has more guts than any man I've ever met. But I'm—" He caught the look on the boy's face and broke off. "Come on, youngster. We've got one piece of luck. The one man who can get action and get it quickly is in Cork. He came down from Dublin for a dinner last night."

Ten minutes later, Judson was repeating his story to a grave, elderly man who had interrupted his breakfast to hear it.

"I think that is the evidence your government needs, sir," said Farrel when Tom had finished.

The elderly man, whose name was O'Donnell, nodded. "You said they propose to let Flynn go as soon as they have the girl?"

"Yes, sir," Judson replied.

"Then we'll get him to say his granddaughter is being held in the house against her will." O'Donnell turned to Farrel. "Gives us the right to search the house. Any people we find who are on our suspect list—and, as you know, my government keeps very close watch on any people suspected of being foreign agents—any suspicious people can be arrested at once. Wait here while I make the necessary arrangements."

O'Donnell got machinery moving with incredible speed, though to Judson the waiting

was almost unendurable. It was barely ten o'clock when he was once again in a car approaching Flynn's cottage. Farrel was beside him and there were two other men, both armed. O'Donnell sat in front with the driver. Behind them was another car, filled with police.

At the top of the path they stopped and Farrel got out. "I'll deal with him," he said, and favoring the artificial leg a little, he walked down to the cottage and pushed open the door.

Joseph Flynn was drowning his sorrows. He sat at the table in the middle of the combined kitchen and livingroom, his head on his hands and a bottle beside him. In a hard voice, Jim Farrel said what he had come to say. He wound up with, "You betrayed your own people in 1916 and in 1920, then you took our money and betrayed us to the Nazis. Three men have lost their lives because of it. And now your double betrayal looks as if it's going to cost your granddaughter's life as well."

"No—no! You mustn't be saying that! If I do as they say, she'll be all right." He looked up in sudden fright and held his head, rocking back and forth. "Wirrah, wirrah, what am I saying?"

"Nonsense," snapped Farrel. "D'you think they'll keep their word? Once her usefulness is ended, they'll kill her with less compunction than you'd swat a fly. Now, are you going to tell your story to Mr. O'Donnell?"

"I can't," moaned Flynn.

"I shouldn't think a third betrayal would bother you," said Farrel contemptuously.

Again Joseph Flynn rocked back and forth. "Och, Mary, me darling, what's a man to do?" He reached for the bottle.

CHAPTER V

FLYNN'S VENGEANCE

FOR BRANDON the night had worn by in a haze of steadily increasing pain. He had no idea of the time, for no streak of daylight could find its way into those cellars. Doubts as to whether Tom would carry out his mission assailed his pain-clouded brain. He had backed his judgment of the boy and Brandon's judgment was usually right. But this time. . . .

He heard the latch on the door lift, then footsteps and voices—Mary's voice saying, "Please, won't you let me go home?"

He recognized Grau's curt tone. "Get Judson and bring him down here."

So Judson's absence had not been discovered yet. And he had not warned the girl. So far, so good. The footsteps were approaching. Miller entered first, carrying a lantern. He swung it in front of Brandon's face. "So. I hope you had an enjoyable night, pig."

"Quite, thanks. You weren't here."

Miller's hand was raised to strike, but Grau's voice arrested it in mid-air.

"Stop being childish, Miller. Don't let him annoy you." He came over and looked appraisingly at his prisoner. "Yes," he said at last. "I think you'll be more amenable today."

"Do you?" asked Brandon. Then there was a little cry and Mary broke from the man who was holding her and ran to him.

"Mr. Brandon!" There was a gasp that was almost a sob in her voice. "They told me grandfather was hurt and now they won't let me go. I don't understand." She clutched him and her white, terror-stricken little face was turned up to him.

"Your grandfather is all right, Mary, and you needn't be frightened. They won't hurt you," Brandon said steadily. He looked over the top of her head and spoke rapidly in German to Grau. "I hate to give you good advice, but you're even greater fools than I think you are if you raise your hand against a woman in this country. You'll be torn limb from limb."

"If they find out," answered Grau with a cold smile. Then he reverted to English. "This woman is one of your agents, isn't she?"

"No."

Grau simply said "Miller," and Miller wrenched the girl away from Brandon and flung her over to Fruehler with a curt "Keep her out of the way," then returned to his contemplation of the prisoner. "I'm going to enjoy this," he said, and prodded Brandon's left shoulder with his forefinger. "Quite swollen, I see. Inflamed, too, I expect." He drew back and swung with every ounce of his weight behind it.

When Brandon came to, he heard Steiner's excited voice saying in rapid German, "—and he's nowhere in the house or grounds!"

"Fool! Bungler!" Grau turned and looked at Brandon. "Cut him down and bring him around." Miller obeyed and Brandon slipped to the stone floor and lay still. Someone brought water and poured it on his face, then Miller hauled him onto his feet.

"Where's Judson?" demanded Grau. "He got away in the night. You know something about this. You had something to do with it."

"How could I?" muttered Brandon thickly. "I was tied up here all night."

"You're lying." Miller hauled off and hit him hard on the mouth. His head went back and when Miller released his hold, he slid again to the floor.

The brutal process was repeated. How many times, Brandon didn't know. He lost track of time in a sea of pain. It was punctuated only by Grau's staccato questions and Mary's sobbing. Then he realized that Sir Robert Morrell had appeared and was saying in a cracked and frightened tone, "—and he's afraid the second car is police."

"Get back upstairs. Receive them. Laugh

at their ideas. Get rid of them if you can. If not—there's the well," said Grau. "The tide's in now."

"But you wouldn't . . ." Morrell looked with horror at Brandon lying on the ground.

"Do as you're told," said Grau. After Morrell had gone, he turned to Miller. "We'd better take no chances," he said in German. "We're not going to learn anything from this man, and the girl's a danger now."

A great wave of relief swept over Brandon. Judson had gone to Farrel and Jim Farrel would carry on. His job was done. Now he was being hauled to his feet again and propelled in the direction of the old dungeon. In the doorway Grau, who was holding the lantern, stopped.

"That wasn't open," he said, pointing to the flagstone that covered the well. "Judson! But how did he know about it? Well, it's too late now. Miller—"

Brandon didn't struggle. He was past that. He felt his feet slip on the rim and then he was falling. The cold sea water rallied his senses and sheer animal instinct made him paddle and get his head above water at just the instant that one ghastly, terror-stricken scream reverberated back and forth in the shaft and Mary plunged down. As Brandon groped for her, he suddenly discovered that he could stand on the bottom and just keep his head above water. His right arm caught hold of the girl and he managed to get her head up. Then there was a thud and the utter darkness told him that the flagstone had been replaced.

Mary was threshing about and making the job of holding her much more difficult. Spasmodic, spluttering sobs of sheer terror came from her. He said curtly, "Keep still," then went on more gently, "All we've got to do is hang on until the tide goes out." Actually, he hadn't the least idea whether the tide was dropping or would come up higher. "At low tide there's less than a foot of water here and a tunnel leads out to the shore. D'you understand? There's nothing to be frightened about. We've only got to be patient and hold on." The sobs died down a little and she ceased to struggle. He knew that it was only his greater ten inches of height that enabled him to keep his head above water, so in a little while he said, "I want you to get against the wall and try to find a rough piece of stone you can hold on to. Then you can float."

"Don't let go of me!" The little voice wavered, though it was making a valiant effort to be brave. Somehow in the dark it sounded so much younger than twenty-four.

"I won't."

After a while a heartbreaking little sob came. "My fingers can't find anything."

"We'll try something else. Get hold of my right shoulder. That's it. Now try and push yourself up a bit. Let the water lift you. Water is buoyant, you know. You learned that in school."

"Oh. That is better."

His deliberately even tone was beginning to have some effect. With the aid of his right arm around her hips and both her hands on his shoulder, she had managed to get her own head and shoulders clear of the water. He pressed her against the wall, holding her there with his own body. "There's a tiny ledge I'm almost sitting on," she said. "But don't let go or I'd slip."

"I won't," he assured her again, wondering how long he could endure it.

There was quite a long pause, then she asked, "Is that true that there's a way out at low tide?"

"Yes. Your friend Tom got out last night."

"But are you sure the tide has turned?"

"Certain," he lied, without the slightest change of tone. There was no point in telling her that the water was creeping up his chin.

UPSTAIRS in the living room with the square modern settee, Sir Robert Morrell was laughing boisterously. "Really, my dear Mr. O'Donnell, if you fellows run round believing cock-and-bull stories told you by old drunkards whose granddaughters have run off with chaps in the village—mighty good-looking girl, I'm told, this Mary Flynn, and plenty of chaps after her—and the fantastic lies of a chauffeur who was discharged because he was a psychopathic case, no wonder the country is going to wrack and ruin!"

"We have to investigate all stories, Sir Robert," explained O'Donnell with a smile which people who knew him could have told was dangerous. "You won't mind if we search? A matter of form." He held out a stamped official document.

"Go ahead, my dear fellow. Help yourself. But it's a lot of nonsense."

They tramped miles. It was a rambling place. They went out onto the old battlements, they investigated the ruined and closed wing, they poked into closets—O'Donnell and Farrel, with Tom beside them and two sturdy-looking police armed with sub-machine guns. The others remained on the ground floor.

"But Brandon was in the cellar, sir," whispered Tom desperately to Farrel.

Just at that moment, O'Donnell said, "Now for the cellars and then, as soon as my men have finished checking your guests, we'll apologize and leave you in peace, Sir Robert." And again he had the smile which his friends knew was dangerous. As they went down to the cellars, he added, "Lot of guests you have."

"Drive down from Dublin to see an old fellow every now and again," mumbled Morrell as he accompanied them down the stairs.

Tom had hurried into the wine cellar and

was staring at the ring in the wall. "That was where Brandon was tied," he said, turning a stricken face to Farrel.

"There! You see! Just a vicious pack of lies." Morrell laughed and there was a faint note of relief in it. "Men tied up in cellars! Girls held against their will! I don't know how you let yourself be taken in by such nonsense, really! This is the twentieth century, you know, my dear fellow!"

"And this is blood. Fresh blood." Farrel had stooped down and run his finger over a smear on the pavement. He looked across at O'Donnell. "By God, the well! The ideal place to hide people," he exclaimed, then added, "or bodies."

Tom had already snatched the lamp and was running in the direction of the dungeon. By the time Farrel caught up with him, he was tugging at the ringed slab. One of the police helped him and as they began to raise it, Mary's voice came up. "Holy Mother, you heard my prayer!"

"Ropes," ordered O'Donnell.

"I can reach her." Tom was lying flat on the floor, reaching over. A few minutes later, dripping and shivering and half hysterical, Mary was in his arms.

It was more of a job to get Brandon up. Once the need to hold the girl against the wall was over, the last of his strength seemed to slip from him.

He barely managed to grasp the rope, and it took the combined efforts of both the policemen to haul him out. He stood for one second, supported by the police officer, and said to Farrel, "Grau's the boss. Little white-haired fellow with a stick—" and collapsed.

O'Donnell said, "Belling—" to one of his men, then looked around. "Where th' devil did Morrell go?"

Sir Robert had dropped behind the others when Farrel mentioned the well and had lingered by the stairs. The instant he had heard Tom's cry of triumph as he had found Mary, he hurried up to the drawing room. Here the "guests" and servants were sitting round under the eye of a brawny officer who looked as if he'd like an excuse to use the gun in the holster at his hip.

Morrell passed by Grau, who was seated next to Lady Morrell with his eyes half closed, looking very old and fragile as became an invalid uncle.

Morrell said, "They're opening up the old well in the dungeon."

Grau looked up and one glimpse of Morrell's face was sufficient to tell him what had happened.

He didn't move a muscle, but under the half-closed lids, his eyes surveyed the thirteen men in the room. There was one police officer here and nine more in the house or outside. In a very quiet voice he addressed the officer.

"Get your hands up and don't try to warn the other police in the hall." As if by magic a heavy black automatic had appeared in his hand.

The brawny policeman gulped, made an instinctive grab towards his gun, then met the unrelenting stare of the black eyes and slowly put his hands up.

"They will come back in here," Grau went on, "no matter what they find. But we have a hostage now. Miller, get his gun."

The man obeyed.

Then suddenly there was a commotion in the hall, the door burst open and Flynn appeared on the threshold, a wild and disheveled figure. He had brought his bottle along with him and he had become tired of sitting outside in the car with the driver, as he had been told.

"You murtherin' apes, what have you done with my girl?" he roared. Then the meaning of the upraised hands of the policeman penetrated his fuddled brain. He saw Grau's gun. "Why, you skinny little snake, I could take you apart with me two bare hands, you and your gun and all!"

He started towards Grau, but a single shot stopped him in his tracks. "Kill me, would you, you murtherin' ape? May God—" He stumbled another step forward and fell, his dying curse trailing off into silence.

Grau glared at Miller, who had fired the shot. "Bungler!" He screamed his favorite accusation. "That will have warned them!"

O'Donnell heard the shot from the head of the cellar stairs. "Look after Brandon," he said to Farrel. "This is our job now."

He opened the door into the hall and gave some curt orders to the men there. From then on, it was short and sweet. Two men with machine guns went in through the door, and two more smashed in the window and covered the room.

The "guests" and household soon lost their taste for violence.

Less than ten minutes later, the sergeant reported, "Twelve prisoners and two corpses. One of our men hurt and Flynn killed."

"AS YOU know, we do everything we can to prevent the agents of any power abusing our neutrality. My government is very grateful to you, Major Brandon, for uncovering this gang of spies," O'Donnell said, an hour later. "Particularly as I understand you're on sick leave and came here for a rest," he added with a perfectly straight face.

Brandon tried to smile but it hurt his cut lip, so he only grunted. He was lying on the square modern settee. Someone had brought a dry pair of trousers for him to change into, and Dr. Stewart from Bantry was dressing his shoulder. One of the police came in, holding out a clean shirt.

"You said a fourteen, didn't you, sir? And I'm thinking that maybe you could get into these shoes for the time being."

Farrel returned with a bottle of brandy in his hand. He poured half a glass and handed it to Brandon, saying to the doctor, "It won't do him any harm, will it?"

Brandon said, "It never has yet," and drank it down.

Dr. Stewart looked up from what he was doing.

"If those swine didn't manage to kill him the way they manhandled him, I doubt if brandy will."

O'Donnell sat down. "I've questioned them, but so far the only one who has talked is Morrell. He had some vague Nazi leanings in 1934 and they filled him up with the dangers of world Bolshevism. Later he got in some kind of crooked financial deal and they covered up for him. Then they persuaded him to take this place and let them fix it up. As they perfected their plans for war, they began to use it as a base. Before he knew what he was getting into, the war had started and he was a front for their headquarters. He was too scared to get out.

"Flynn was easy." He lowered his voice a little. With a glance at Mary who, wrapped in a blanket, was crying quietly in Tom Judson's arms.

"He'd been an informer for the English until his son was killed by them, then he turned against them. For the rest, they recruited petty criminals, deserters and any other kind of riffraff they could find for local observers. There was a whole collection of forged military discharges in a file upstairs. Seven of the prisoners were on our list of suspects, though we'd never been able to get any evidence against them. Their file also had a list of their men in Dublin and along the border. I've sent orders for them to be brought in." O'Donnell paused a moment, then went on. "There is also a great deal of information which they have collected. Fruehling was going to take it out tonight, together with anything further these men who arrived this morning might turn in.

"We'll be waiting for the plane when it arrives," he added grimly. "Will you appear in the proceedings against them?"

Brandon shook his head. "Keep me out of it. You've got plenty for a criminal case here. Murder."

O'Donnell nodded. "If it's your wish. I'm driving back to Cork, now. I want to make arrangements for tonight. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"If you could cut the red tape so that Judson can be sent back to England. I'll recommend him for a medical board when he gets there," said Brandon.

Judson gently detached himself from Mary and came over. He stood by the settee. "I'm ready to go back, sir. To whatever I've got coming to me."

"I'll do what I can for you, Tom. I didn't want to make any promises because I didn't know if I'd be alive to keep them. But this will weigh in your favor."

"Whatever happens, I want to thank you for—I mean, what you said last night—and trusting me . . ." Tom stammered awkwardly.

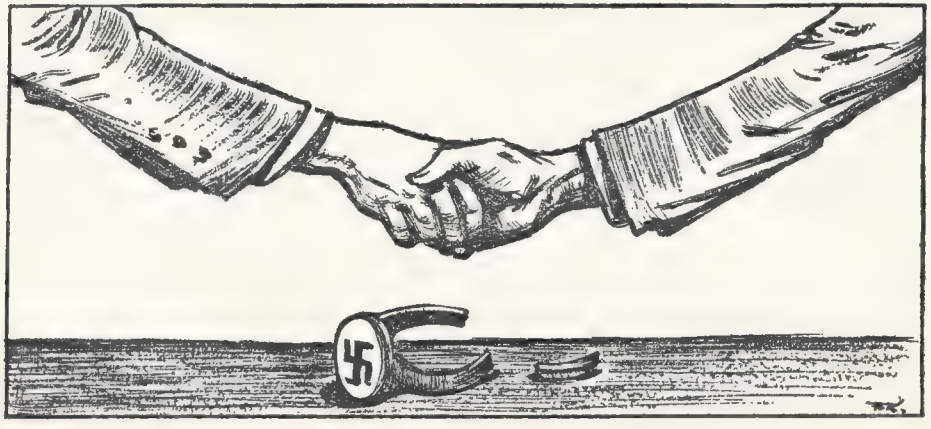
Brandon held out his hand. "You didn't let me down," he said.

"Anything else we can do, Brandon?" asked O'Donnell.

"Perhaps you could also fix the red tape so that I needn't leave the country by the back door," said Brandon, remembering his ten-mile walk in the dark to cross the border. "On account of my sick leave."

O'Donnell smiled. "Very irregular, but I'll do it."

Dr. Stewart was working on Brandon's ankle now. He looked up. "You're not making any mistake about that, Mr. O'Donnell," he said. "The major's going to be on sick leave for a long time."



THE TRAIL AHEAD

Malaria, long marches, short rations—all these had whittled Kane down till his morale was shot and General Datu Ryan knew that unless something were done—and in a hurry—a complete crack-up was in the cards. E. Hoffmann Price in

"GUERRILLA FURLOUGH"

—logs the answer to the problem. That it turned out to be a sort of postman's holiday afloat didn't matter too much. The long sea voyage to Palau, even though punctuated by Jap destroyer fire and a hail of machine-gun bullets, instead of bouillon in bed and quoits on the sundeck, was just what the doctor ordered. And Kane could sail back to Mindanao after the cruise, fit as a fiddle again and set to give all aid and comfort to MacArthur's men the minute they began to pour in.

You may think you've been having tire trouble with that old jaloppy but you ain't seen nothin' yet. Wait till Keith Edgar lets you help Crazy McIntosh jack up an eight-driver hog next month in another hilarious episode in the career of the world's worst brakeman and you'll really know what "Tire Trouble" means. . . . There are three ways to do almost anything these days; the right way, the wrong way and "The Army Way." Norman Rose and Len Zinberg, in as human a GI yarn as we've read in many a moon, gives us the lowdown on the latter method. . . . Ray Millholland, forsaking Marines Deal and Magurth momentarily for an Army mule, takes us to Italy to meet "Private Dynamite" who was worth a whole batallion of half-tracks. . . . William Arthur Breyfogle ships us to the Gulf of Papua to watch a smuggler carry on a feud with a revenue officer that had begun before the war, carried on right through the big fracas and was going "To Be Continued" after the peace. . . . Jonathan Fettes lets us sit in aboard the convoyed merchantman *McGillicuddy* as Captain Junius gives the crew of a Nazi raider a lesson on the right to be decent in "Not for Glory". . . . And "Rufiji" Barker send us from Tanganyika Territory, where he is game warden of one of the largest preserves in the world, a fabulous though factual account of the crocs that infest his domain. . . . Then there's another Captain Carter novelette by William Du Bois. . . . The next gripping installment of the Gilligan serial. . . . Plus a varied assortment of departmental features such as can be found each month only in—

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KING'S PIRATE

By

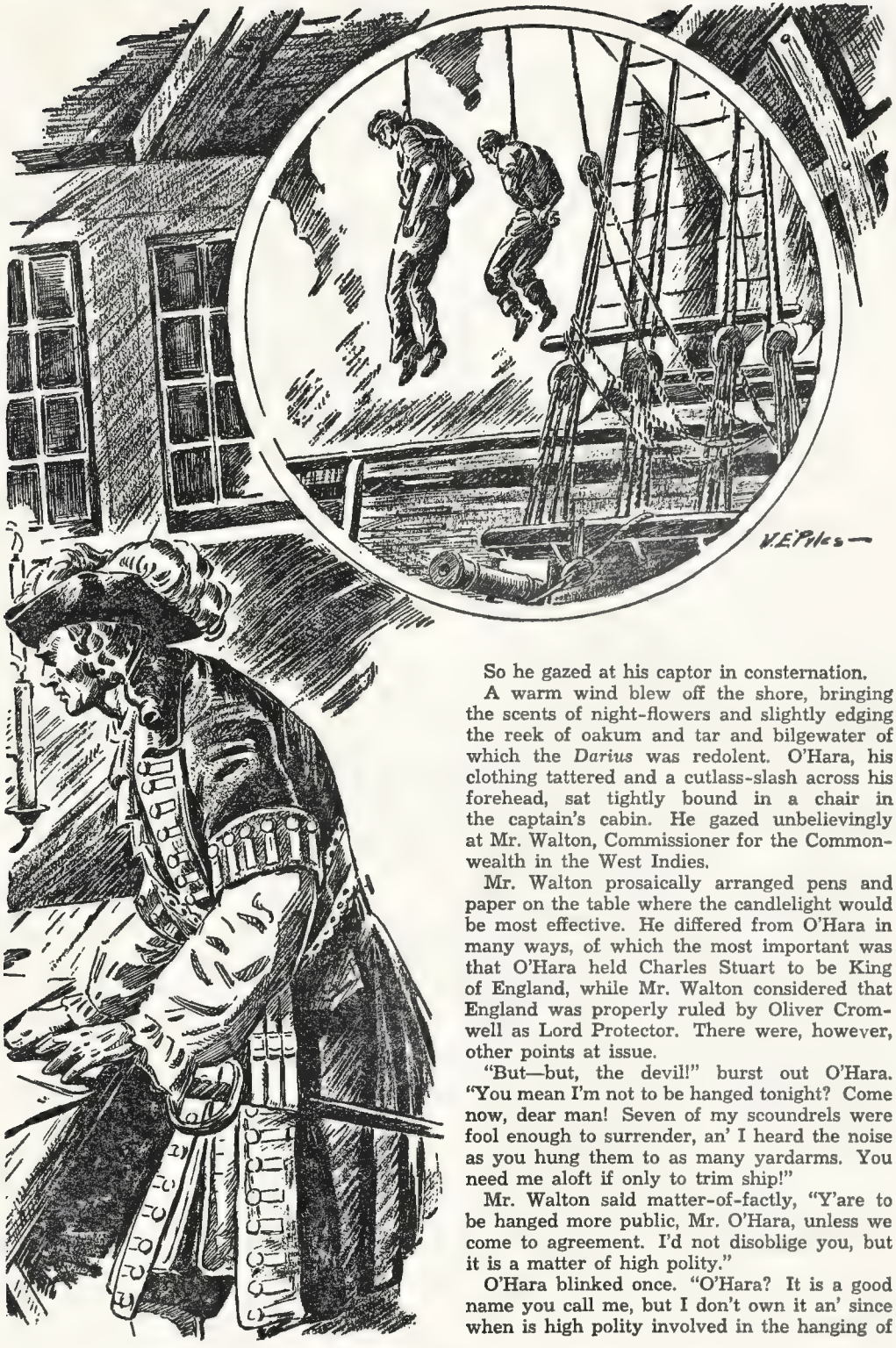
WILL F. JENKINS

IT WAS partly a prophecy, and partly Mistress Dorothy Boyd, and partly King Charles the Second, in exile in Paris with scarce two pairs of breeches to his name. The three things together made it needful that O'Hara hang immediately. He'd been taken red-handed in an act of piracy which was an attempt to relieve the King's poverty as Drake's lootings had served the Virgin Queen a century before. Some sixteen loyal gentlemen of Tobago—including Dorothy's father—had joined together to furnish a pirate ship and crew as a loyal enterprise on behalf of the King. But the *Saucy Ann* was sunk now, with most of her crew of not over-enthusiastic cutthroats, and the matter needed to be ended quietly.

If O'Hara were taken back to Tobago for trial, the King might be accused of fostering the adventure, which would be unjust. The sixteen gentlemen might be uncovered and hanged for their loyalty to an unfortunate monarch, which would be deplorable. And Mistress Dorothy Boyd would surely cry her pretty eyes out, which would be tragedy. The solution was for O'Hara to hang with those lesser pirates now strung up to the yardarms of the *Darius*.

"Since when is high polity involved in the hanging of a pirate?" scoffed O'Hara. "Come now, Commissioner, you know you need me aloft if only to trim the ship!"

ILLUSTRATED BY V. E. PYLES



So he gazed at his captor in consternation.

A warm wind blew off the shore, bringing the scents of night-flowers and slightly edging the reek of oakum and tar and bilgewater of which the *Darius* was redolent. O'Hara, his clothing tattered and a cutlass-slash across his forehead, sat tightly bound in a chair in the captain's cabin. He gazed unbelievingly at Mr. Walton, Commissioner for the Commonwealth in the West Indies.

Mr. Walton prosaically arranged pens and paper on the table where the candlelight would be most effective. He differed from O'Hara in many ways, of which the most important was that O'Hara held Charles Stuart to be King of England, while Mr. Walton considered that England was properly ruled by Oliver Cromwell as Lord Protector. There were, however, other points at issue.

"But—but, the devil!" burst out O'Hara. "You mean I'm not to be hanged tonight? Come now, dear man! Seven of my scoundrels were fool enough to surrender, an' I heard the noise as you hung them to as many yardarms. You need me aloft if only to trim ship!"

Mr. Walton said matter-of-factly, "Y'are to be hanged more public, Mr. O'Hara, unless we come to agreement. I'd not disoblige you, but it is a matter of high polity."

O'Hara blinked once. "O'Hara? It is a good name you call me, but I don't own it an' since when is high polity involved in the hanging of

a pirate caught red-handed?" Then he grinned engagingly. "Come, now! 'Twill be no trouble! Just a bit of a command, now, an' you not only set the matter orderly, but rest the soul of a poor half-witted creature dead these ten years gone! You'd not disoblige a ghost, I'm sure!"

Mr. Walton looked up from his pens and his forehead creased.

"My nurse," said O'Hara promptly, "a half-witted creature with the second sight. When I was born she told my parents I'd hang to the yardarm of a ship and after live as the happiest of men. Then she racked her poor brains to understand her own sayin' until she went pure daft. They say she haunts the ould home now, and by hangin' me appropriate you'd surely lay her spirit half-way, at least!"

Mr. Walton laid down the last pen with an air of satisfaction. He ignored O'Hara's explanation.

"This will serve as an official interrogation, Mr. O'Hara," he observed. "I will not ask your name and antecedents. I've written them already. You are Charles O'Hara of Ballybrig Castle, in Connaught. Because of misguided loyalty to Charles Stuart, who pretends to be king despite acts of Parliament, you conspired with divers persons in Tobago to engage in piracy to supply his necessities."

O'Hara blinked again.

" 'Twas my own idea to turn pirate," he said humorously," an' you make a fine fancy tale of it. Not," he added, "but it would be a good deed for someone to give aid to the poor dear King, whose breech would be shown did he take off his coat."

Mr. Walton, Commissioner for the Commonwealth, looked annoyed.

"Y'are in a mood to deny," he said distastefully. "I show you Mr. Blake."

HE went to the cabin door and opened it. A pasty-white face smirked at O'Hara. O'Hara stiffened in his chair. His face went deathly pale, and his eyes took fire with a sudden raging contempt that was white-hot. Mr. Walton closed the door again. It had opened inward, into the cabin.

"Mr. Blake was an informer, eh?" said O'Hara in a stifled voice.

"More that that," said the commissioner matter-of-factly. "He was my agent. He sold you the *Saucy Ann* for your piracy. He supplied the cannon and powder. And he recruited a crew of cutthroats for you. But it was by my order, as a matter of high polity."

O'Hara swallowed. Then he looked at the commissioner with a remoteness which was far beyond contempt.

"And how does it feel, sir," he asked politely," to be knowing that you are the cold-blooded murderer of those poor scoundrels who've been shot an' stabbed an' the balance of them hung, an' all because you gave that order?"

Mr. Walton sat down and picked up a pen. He tested its point.

"Why, sir," he confessed reasonably, "one feels disturbed. One regrets the necessity. But as a patriot one feels justified, because in the past year or two there has been a dangerous growth of sentiment in favor of a return to monarchy."

There were noises on the deck overhead as the *Darius* got under way and headed northward again, creaking and groaning with the motion of the seas. The deck underfoot developed a decided slant as the frigate heeled over under the trade-wind. Mr. Walton explained patiently in the candle-lit cabin. He was painstakingly lucid. As Commissioner for the Commonwealth in the West Indies, he had worried over an increasing turn of public sentiment in favor of the royal exile.

"His Most Gracious Majesty, Charles the Second," said O'Hara politely," an' be damned to you, sir!"

Mr. Walton waved his hand. There was need of something to counteract this growing sentiment. People forgot the tyrannies of the late king and inclined to put themselves once more beneath a royal yoke. Mr. Walton had had the matter much at heart, and therefore, when his agent Blake reported Mr. O'Hara's hare-brained scheme of piracy on the king's behalf, he saw in it an opportunity.

"An opportunity! Holy mother! What would you be considerin' a temptation?" demanded O'Hara.

Mr. Walton observed that, as he had explained, his conscience was clear.

"Dear man!" protested O'Hara. "You murder my thirty-odd amiable scoundrels in cold blood, an' still talk of a conscience?"

The cutthroats, said Mr. Walton severely, were pirates. They had been inclined to crime in any case. Offered an opportunity, they had captured ships and sunk them—

"We captured four," said O'Hara as severely. "Two were loaded wi' melons and one with live pigs which squealed and stank to high heaven. We let them go. The fourth was a dispatch-boat wi' confidential advices to you from the Admiral of the Caribbean Squadron. I read them."

For once, Mr. Walton seemed to feel emotion.

"The last lot of ship's biscuit is not only wormy, but mouldy to boot," said O'Hara, "an' he asks that for God's sake you find him some salt pork."

Mr. Walton subsided. After a moment he went on. He was aware of course, that a number of young and enterprising gentlemen had intended to join the *Saucy Ann* as volunteers. In forestalling them with a fifty-gun frigate, he had tempered patriotism with mercy. He could have caught a number of young royalist hot-heads by merely waiting.

"Dear man," said O'Hara impatiently," as a patriot you'd ha' hung me an hour since. In mercy you'd not talk me to death. Ha' done or out wi' it!"

Mr. Walton came out with it. The *Darius* was now headed back to Tobago, where Mr. O'Hara would be tried. But he need not be hanged. In fact, if he confessed freely, in writing now and from the dock at his trial—

"Confess?" said O'Hara indignantly. "What more would you have? Wasn't I taken red-handed, fightin' the sailors?"

Mr. Walton meant, of course, that he should confess that he had taken to piracy at the command of the so-called king, Charles the Second, that piracy practised by misguided adherents supported the royal court. Of course, Mr. Walton added, Mr. O'Hara would also corroborate Mr. Blake's testimony against the sixteen gentlemen who had paid for the fitting-out of the *Saucy Ann*.

O'Hara bellowed with rage and strained at his bonds, his face growing nearly purple.

Mr. Walton waited, and then pointed out reasonably that the trial would go through in any case, and Mr. Blake's testimony would be damning. There was no reason why Mr. O'Hara should not benefit by cooperation with the inevitable.

O'Hara got his breath and swore as if the gift of tongues had descended upon him. Mr. Walton waited for some time, but at long last he went disappointedly away.

With breathlessness, a deep gloom settled upon O'Hara.

"The scut is clever," he muttered bitterly. "Damned clever! The king'll be maligned an' some fools will believe all pirates are royalists and all royalists pirates. An' Dorothy's father will be denounced an' hanged with the rest of us, and she'll cry her eyes out for him instead of me! Oh, damn the man! He's clever!"

HE sat bound in his chair with the deck tilted below him while the *Darius* went on northward, with hanged pirates dangling from her yardarms, O'Hara scowled at the door. Presently he muttered again, indignantly.

"He's a scoundrel, no less! An' it's an insult for any man to think he can be a bigger scoundrel than an O'Hara, especially one that's been prophesied to hang to a yardarm and after marry Dorothy! 'Twould serve his impudence no less than right, now . . ."

He knitted his brows, muttering furiously. Then he began angrily to work at his ropes. There was a fraction of an inch of slack. He explored the situation in view of this fact. It was promising.

He had freed himself from the chair when the door opened and the captain's servant came in with a tray on which was a bottle, a glass, and a dish of biscuits. He stared astounded at O'Hara who looked formidable enough with a slash across his forehead and the stains of battle upon him.

"Beg pardon, sir," said the servant, gulping. "The captain's compliments and he sent me to untie you, sir, and offer you some refreshment."

"He did, now?" said O'Hara. "'Twas very civil of him. An' am I to be chained an' put in some dungeon or other?"

"No-no, sir," said the servant. "The captain has resigned his cabin to you, sir, as a matter of courtesy to your misfortune."

"My compliments to him, then," said O'Hara. "It's a fine gentleman he is an' I'm much obliged. 'Tis a delicate attention."

He poured a glass of wine, shedding the last bit of rope. The servant fled. The door opened to let him out, and O'Hara saw the armed guard outside his door—only one man, and that man a sailor. O'Hara gulped the wine and stuffed his mouth with biscuit. There was the turning of a key in the door-lock. O'Hara shrugged and went to the cabin windows. But the *Darius* was no luxurious ship, with fittings for an admiral. The stern windows were small—too small for his broad shoulders to pass through. He looked out over the foaming wake upon a phosphorescent sea.

"Now, when I've hung to a yardarm," said O'Hara," an' am livin' as the happiest of men, I'm thinkin' 'twould be fine to have a sea honeymoon wi' such a view to look at."

He drank a second glass of wine and moved briskly about the cabin. But his inspection was perfunctory. He came to a halt before the door, regarding the hinges with sudden affection. The door opened inward. He fumbled in his pockets, and found nothing. In the end he took the metal buckles from one of his shoes and bent down to the lower hinge. He set to work.

"There could be worse beginnin's," he reflected complacently, "than to be an Irish gentleman's son, with a curmudgeon of a father who tried to keep the brandy locked up!"

The *Darius* swept northward, heeled over a little and rising and falling to the seas. Creaks and groans sounded through her fabric. Such small sounds as O'Hara made were not apt to be heard. He was, after all, an old hand at the task.

A reasonably short time later, he took one of the captain's silver candlesticks in one hand and opened the door briskly. The candlestick descended shrewdly and with zest. O'Hara dragged his unconscious guard back into the cabin and reclosed and fastened the door. He stripped his captive and bound him soundly in the chair in which he himself had been trussed up not long since. Then he poured himself a glass of wine and waited patiently until the seaman opened his eyes and groaned.

O'Hara promptly shut off his breathing with

two fingers and thrust the neck of the wine-bottle into the seaman's suddenly gaping mouth. He gave him breath again and whispered savagely, "Now, be a good man an' drink what's in the bottle, or as sure as a roundhead snuffles, I'll be carvin' you into little bits and stuffin' you through the windows for the sharks to eat! Drink now, man!"

The seaman had no choice. Gagged by the bottle's neck, he had to breathe. If he ceased to drink, O'Hara pinched his nose and cut off his breath completely. He drank. It was good wine; old wine, and heady. The seaman blinked and licked his lips when the last drop was down.

"'Tis disgraceful," said O'Hara severely," for a seaman to be drunk, but 'twould be inconvenient for him to be dead just because he made a noise! Be quiet, now!"

He waved the silver candlestick suggestively. The seaman looked at him affrightedly. The *Darius* swayed on through the night. There was a cool wind across her decks. She lifted and fell as great swells passed beneath her, and her every movement was full of a heavy grace. Her sails swelled tautly. All was serene aloft. But down in the captain's cabin a seaman hiccoughed solemnly, and the eyes with which he watched O'Hara grew faintly glazed.

"There, now," said O'Hara kindly. "You're feelin' better. Would you be feelin' better still if I sang you a lullaby?"

The seaman hiccoughed again. The wine was very old and very strong indeed. In another ten minutes he was sound asleep, with his head lolling from side to side as the frigate swayed.

O'Hara nodded with satisfaction. He picked up the seaman's stripped-off garments. Then he set about various other activities designed to fulfill a prophecy. They seemed not especially likely to bring that prophecy about, but rather to be sheer fantasy. However, within an hour they bore fruit.

MR. WALTON came to a painful decision. His plan to buttress the Commonwealth by revealing the exiled prince as a promoter of piracy was too good a scheme to abandon. He determined to interview O'Hara again and try to shake his resolution. It might not be pleasant to face O'Hara's scorn, but the proposed revelation was so sound an act of high polity that patriotism demanded it.

Mr. Walton went below to the captain's cabin. The seaman on guard came respectfully to attention. Mr. Walton unlocked the cabin door and stepped inside. Then he stared in stupefication at the very obvious specimen of a pressed seaman who sat tied in the captain's chair, naked as an egg and drunk as a Lord and snoring.

Mr. Walton closed his mouth—it had dropped open of itself—and furiously summoned aid. He gave coldly specific orders. Ungentle ministrations sobered the seaman, who told the strict and literal truth as he knew it, in terror of punishment.

"And O'Hara is gone," said Mr. Walton icily. "An hour since, I heard a seaman swearing at someone as he went forward just after the guard was changed, but I did not think anyone would dare to swear at me! However, it was doubtless O'Hara. The question is, how did he escape and where is he?"

He saw a junior officer smiling behind his hand and sharply asked what was so amusing.

"I just wondered, sir," said the junior officer, "if O'Hara had a father who kept the wine locked up. My father locked his wine away carefully, but the hinges of the door were outside and my brothers and I used to knock the pins out and slip the door aside when we wished a few bottles for a frolic."

It was very obvious. O'Hara had pried out the hinge-pins with the buckle of his shoe. Knocking the guard senseless had enabled him, at leisure, to make the man drunk, to don the man's clothes, to re-open and unlock the door, to replace the pins and relock the door, and then to stand pious guard over himself until duly relieved in the darkness belowdecks.

"Clever!" said Mr. Walton, thin-lipped. "It seems the pretender's court trains not only pirates but pick-locks as well! But he is still on the ship. He must be found!"

Wherefore the *Darius* sailed on with serenity abovedecks as before, but with pandemonium below. Every man on the ship was commanded to search. Every nook and cranny must be looked into, every water-butt sounded and every cask rapped upon. Bags of biscuit were to be inspected and the bilges examined. Rope-lockers, store-chests—every cubic inch of the *Darius* must be looked at, thumped on, and thrust through. O'Hara must be found!

The first search did not uncover him. Walton commanded that it be done all over again, each man searching in a new section of the ship; this in case some secret sympathizer had compounded O'Hara's hiding. The second search drew blank also. He sternly ordered a third.

When the last barrel of stores had been turned over for the third time, the weary, sweating, and infuriated seamen not only cursed Mr. Walton and the Commonwealth; they were almost prepared to join in prayers for the exiled king. By dawn, in fact, the whole ship was very nearly royalist.

But by dawn O'Hara had made himself relatively comfortable. He watched the red sunrise from an unexampled vantage-point. But he was still gloomy. With security had come realization. The matter of the prophecy was well in hand, but there were loose ends. One was Blake, the informer, still unblushingly

ready to swear away the lives of loyal gentlemen who'd merely tried to serve the King and also line their pockets by furnishing the *Saucy Ann*. And Dorothy's father was among them. If O'Hara was to live as the happiest of men, Blake had to be out of the way—preferably at the bottom of the sea or hanging to a yardarm like all the poor devils that he'd betrayed.

" 'Tis the devil an' all to be a gentleman," complained O'Hara, as the sea revolved slowly beneath him. " 'Twould be so simple merely to knock him on the head, but I can't murder the scoundrel. Now, whoever'd ha' thought that bein' a gentleman would hinder a man in carryin' out a prophecy, eh?"

Tumult rose from the decks below. The *Darius* was to be searched for a fourth time, by daylight. O'Hara let his head hang to one side as seamen came up the shrouds. Nobody'd be looking at him too closely, and with all the frigate's canvas spread nobody would think to count the figures that had been hoisted aloft the night before. Seven pirates had surrendered, and seven had been hung to the *Darius'* yardarms. But now there were eight dangling figures. O'Hara was definitely alive, thanks to an improvised harness under his borrowed seaman's clothes, but, in perfect safety and in strict fulfilment of the prophecy, he was hanging to a yardarm.

He stayed there while the *Darius* sailed beneath a sky as blue as indigo, upon a sea as blue as ink. She was a beautiful, a graceful, and a stately sight. But she was very nearly a madhouse. Mr. Walton had lost his dignity in his indignation. At noon he had all hands on deck and pots of oakum burning smokily below. If he could not root O'Hara out of hiding, he would smoke him out! But there was no visible result. During the afternoon he made a muster of the crew and verified the identity of every man, and then sent the sergeant-at-arms with a party of marines to make yet another search of all the ship. But the smoke made search impossible. The marines staggered abovedecks, strangling, and even Mr. Walton could not insist upon the execution of the order. But he reflected with an embittered satisfaction that O'Hara was undoubtedly suffocated in whatever hiding-place he'd found.

THE ship made a landfall in mid-afternoon, and at sunset the end of the voyage was in sight. Beating upwind to the harbor was a tedious matter, though, and it was midnight before the frigate floated in between the forts of Tobago, later yet before she dropped anchor. By then Mr. Walton was sure that O'Hara had died ignominiously in some rathole below, and he had begun to recast his plans for the trial of the sixteen gentlemen against whom Blake would testify. His case would be nowhere near so good, but he resolved to make it serve.

He heard the uproar of coughing as men removed hatches to let smoke escape from below-decks, and he listened to it vengefully. But he did not hear a small sound as a man in tattered seaman's clothing slipped down a line overside and began swimming for the shore.

O'Hara dined sumptuously at the residence of Mistress Dorothy's father at three o'clock in the morning. Mistress Dorothy had risen from bed for the occasion, and even in her father's presence regarded him with eyes which at once were very soft and very bright. He was dressed as a gentleman again, but there was something piratical, even so, about the bandage now covering the cutlass-slash on his forehead. Dorothy's father listened to his tale, fidgeting.

"But damme, O'Hara!" he said apprehensively." I can't blame you for what happened, of course, but what's to be done? Even with you gone, there's Blake to swear our lives away! A pity he wasn't killed!"

" 'Tis agreein' with you I am," said O'Hara, "but would you ha' had me murder him? A duel was out of the question. The scoundrel's no gentleman!"

Dorothy's father set his lips tight.

"I'll send word to the others," he said hurriedly," and we'll make out of port in as many small ships as we can compass. Walton will catch some of us, no doubt, but with only the *Darius* he can't catch us all."

"Wait now," said O'Hara comfortably. "There's no haste, save for me. I must away, because there are plenty who saw me taken red-handed, fightin' the sailors. But the rest of you are safe enough."

"Safe? If Blake's still alive—"

(Continued on page 138)

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BUY WAR BONDS!

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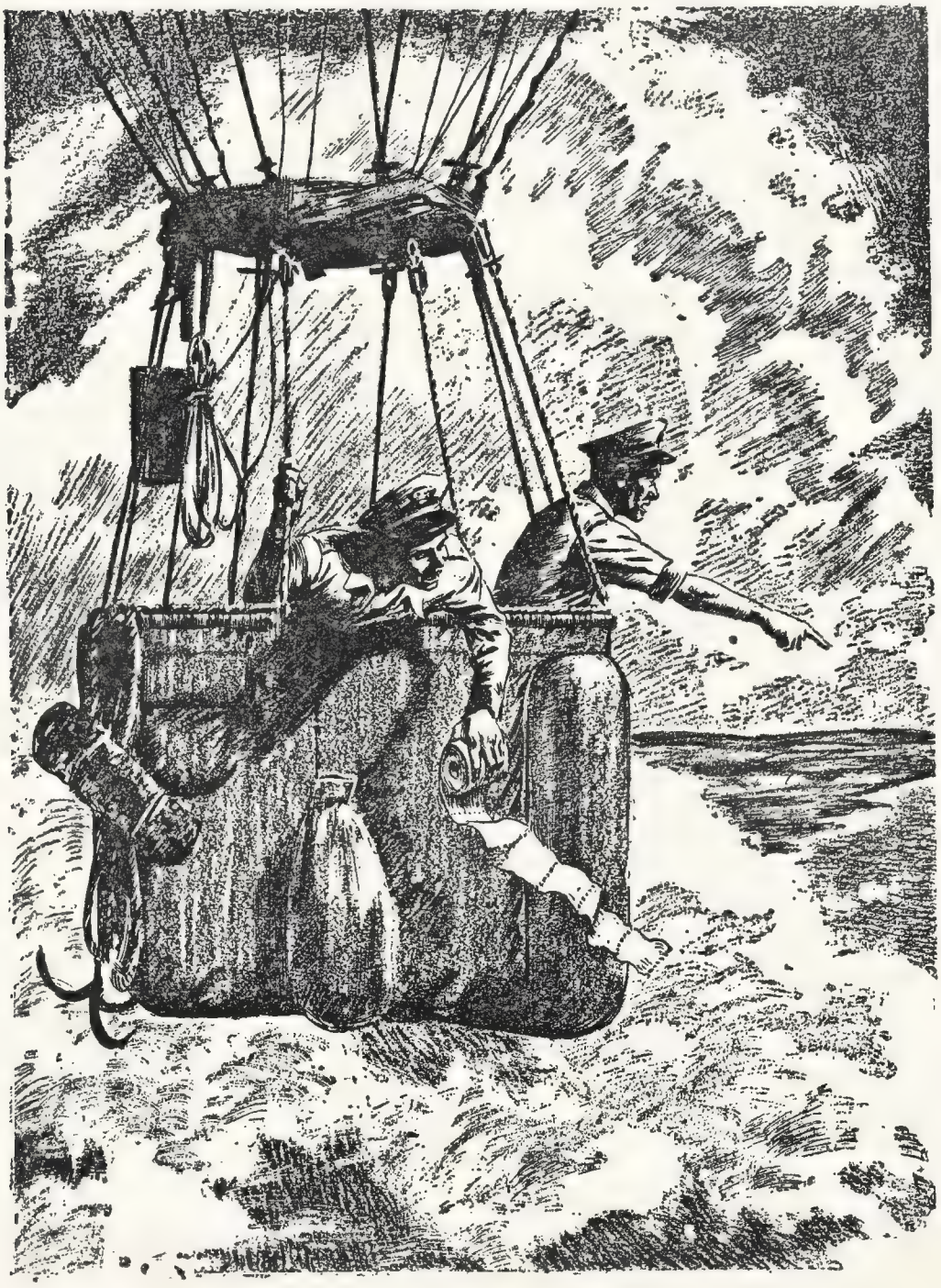
THE TIRED OLD



BAG OF BUKA

By STUART D. LUDLUM

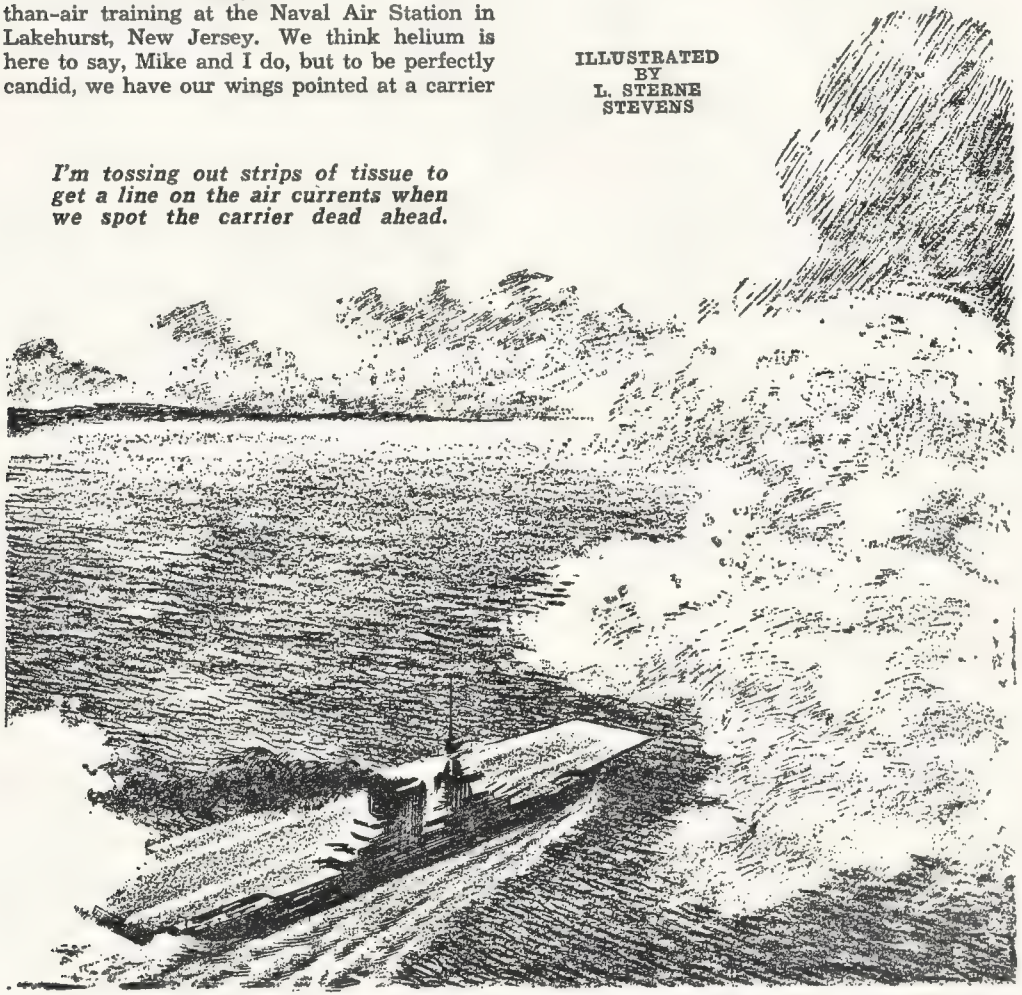
IN THE middle and south Pacific there are probably lots of islands named Buka. There's that one on the map just north of Bougainville, but that's not the Buka we get mixed up with. Ours is much nearer Truk—one of Truk's well-concealed outlying supply bases. A hard-to-crack atoll if there ever was one—that is, until Betsy, our weary friend, spits on her hands and laces into the assignment. The actual location of our Buka is as closely guarded a naval secret as our fling with Betsy.

It all gets started when Mike and I, a couple of Naval Reserve ensigns, are sent to lighter-than-air training at the Naval Air Station in Lakehurst, New Jersey. We think helium is here to say, Mike and I do, but to be perfectly candid, we have our wings pointed at a carrier squadron when that roulette wheel in the office in Washington that decides where naval aviators will be assigned orders us to the blimps.

The life of an airman dangling beneath a blimp is not dull by any means, but we are set on going to war in single-place Grummans behind 2000 horsepower. We're not the kind who push around easily either, I might add.

Anyway, we're at Lakehurst getting the word on the wind, which is strictly to be reckoned with when you're flying, especially when you're flying blimps. First the Annapolis jokers send

ILLUSTRATED BY L. STERNE STEVENS



I'm tossing out strips of tissue to get a line on the air currents when we spot the carrier dead ahead.

us floating out over the scrub pine and sand in free balloons. Two hundred years ago a free balloon was a bag of hot air with a basket hung below. Today helium — or hydrogen, if you aren't the worrying kind—has taken the place of the hot air. Otherwise there has been little or no advancement in the art of free ballooning. The angle is to teach us how to make a balloon go up, come down, and ride the air currents.

To someone who can think only in terms of airplanes, the gear with which you go ballooning seems anything but heaven-sent. You take along sand, a carrier pigeon, and tissue in the convenient roll. The sand is ballast, and you dump it in small quantities when you want to go up. The tissue you tear up and toss out to get a line on the air currents. And the pigeons you send home with your location when you come down.

Mike and I catch on quick, and it isn't long before we decide to solo. How we get away from Lakehurst—just the two of us, without an instructor—involves details that probably wouldn't interest you as much as they might interest certain parties in the Lakehurst area.

ALL you have to know about balloons to become an adequate free-balloon jockey is this: The gas in the envelope—bag, to you—is lighter than air. Put a lot in, the balloon gets light, which means it will lift considerable weight: the basket, the pigeon, the roll of tissue, the bags of sand ballast, Mike and me and any other gadgets we might have a hankering to take along.

The balloon is considered to be in equilibrium when it will just lift its basket, cargo and ballast. Drop a little ballast and up you go. Let out a little gas and down you come. You toss out strips of tissue paper, watch them flutter around in the air currents (they go different directions at different altitudes), then rise or drop to get in the currents you think might take you where you want to go. It's not advisable, however, to get your mind set on a particular route when you go ballooning.

In addition to the ballast bags, we have an open box of sand attached to the side of the basket and equipped with a tablespoon. If we want to go up faster, we spoon off a little sand. Just a spoonful or two will make her climb. If we want to stop rising, we pull a rope (we haven't been in the Navy long enough to call ropes "lines" all the time) which opens a valve and lets gas escape. Simple.

You take off by getting in and floating up and away. You land by valving off gas as you drift downwind towards the spot where you want to land. When you're a foot or so above the ground, you "rip her," releasing all of her gas in one glob, doing away with lift suddenly and entirely. The bag collapses. The basket drops onto the ground and you step out as gracefully as a Powers model opening the Spring Showing.

Now you've got the word on ballooning; so let's get on with what happened to Betsy.

To be perfectly on the up and up with you, we don't just happen to go soloing (or maybe it should be dueting) in our balloon when the wind is out of the north and when an aircraft carrier whose movements we are acquainted with just happens to be pushing down into Delaware Bay, south of us, heading for a more active theater of war than Lakehurst, New Jersey. We'd been studying the air currents in the Lakehurst-Philadelphia-Delaware River area the way a district manager studies his stores, and we were ready to make the break when we got the tip.

Shortly after we clear out of Lakehurst we're riding downwind at a good twenty-knot clip. I get so interested in listening to life below that I valve off too much gas in an effort to keep within earshot of the ground. That's one thing about balloons I never can get over—the way you can hear up there. Voices and sounds rise, it seems, and you can catch normal conversation a good five hundred feet up. Of course, a balloon doesn't make much noise floating along on the breeze. I overhear some guy making a date. Then a kid yelling his fool head lopsided because his ma wants him to come in the house for something or other. We hear a lot of stuff like that—just New Jersey living through another day, but it's interesting.

I'm tossing out strips of tissue to get a line on the air currents when we spot the carrier dead ahead. We can see it before we cross the shoreline. I'd say we're a good thousand feet up.

The paper tells us that at that altitude the wind would shove us just about due south. Five hundred feet lower there is another current that would give us a bit of a hook, send us just a bit east of south. It's up to us to try to hit that speck in the distance with nothing but these two air currents to work with. We sweat like a couple of convicts who can see the open gate across the yard and the walls lined with guards ready to shoot. We may be able to make it, and then again . . .

The carrier's easing down the river at what I'd guess is fifteen knots or so. The wind's pushing us along probably five knots faster. That means we're gaining on it at a brisk walk, which gives us time to try a bit of communications, using a small steel mirror to flash the rays of the sun and make with the dots and dashes.

"Forced landing imminent," I flash. "May we come aboard?"

"How in hell," they flash back, "do you expect to—"

But before they can blink the next word I answer, "Thanks. We're a touch lacking in

right rudder, but we're going to try it. We don't swim so good, so stand by."

We valve off gas until we're just a mite heavy and dropping slightly. We seem to be sliding into line pretty well. The wind is carrying us just a bit to the right, but we're still far behind. We drop some more and pick up the air current that has a left tendency in it. The carrier is blinking dits and dahs at us, but we're too busy to pay attention. Maybe we can put it down on the flight deck. What the hell, why not take a shot at it?

We're coming up the groove, as the area behind the carrier is called, gaining slowly. We can see the gang on the flight deck and island. The deck is clear of planes. Either they don't have any aboard or they're stowed on the hangar deck. Anyway, we have the whole flight deck to shoot at.

It's about a hundred yards away now, and the wind has us right in line. I valve a good slice of helium, and we drop till we're about thirty feet off the water. We're below the flight deck level. I begin to spoon the sand but fast, and we start to rise, slowly at first, then faster. Up we shoot past the ramp, the stern end of the flight deck.

We're climbing rapidly and drifting toward the island structure, which is halfway down the deck. I try to valve gas, but we continue to rise. The island looms.

"Rip her," Mike shouts.

I do.

I'll bet we're twenty feet above the deck when every breath of that helium leaves the envelope. Only one thing can happen. It does. Five hundred pounds of dead weight drops with conviction. We hit, bounce and are strewn over the deck, picking up bruises and strains before coming to rest—Mike in a gun emplacement, me in the cable carrier some quick-thinking sailor snaps into place to keep our deflated balloon from blowing over the side.

The corpsmen work us over with salves, lotions, bandages and stickum, and by the time we limp into the august presence of the captain, he's got a picture of our landing which one of the photographers snapped a fraction of a second after we ripped the envelope. To him it looks funny. To us, no. Nevertheless, things seem to be going all right; so with the faint, pained grins so often affected by bandaged comedians, we concur in his amusement.

I'm not going to reveal the line of reasoning we use to get this gold-braided skipper to keep us, because we may need it again. It has to do with the piracy laws, plus a clause or two concerning the right of salvage, a quote from the Bill of Rights and a line of lyrics from *I Love America.*

Before we know it, we're worming our way through the atoll country somewhere in the Pacific. Mike and I are holding down jobs deep in the bowels of the carrier, and we have a hard time keeping up with all that's going on with the fliers. We pump them, in the wardroom though, and we gather it would be nothing to be surprised about if the Japs should sneak up behind us, we're creeping so deep into their waters.

We always carry a cordon of planes high in the sky above the task force while others search in all directions, looking for Japs who are looking for us. Our fighters clip every Jap scout plane that shows up and "burn" them before they get near us. But they don't spot any subs and let me tell you, it's no fun to do paper work at the waterline when the boys who are in the know say Jap subs are lurking. The idea of catching a torpedo right where the armchair swivels is not acceptable to Mike and me; so at chow this particular day we corner our most talkative pilot friend, and before long we're laden with the most interesting intelligence that has come our way since landing on this floating birdcage.

This Buka—not the Bougainville one, the secret one—is giving the ring boys on the bridge (Annapolis officers, so named because of their ever-present class rings) the jitters. For reasons which are highly confidential, we do not want to send any aircraft low over or around the island. And if the Japs have anything on it, they have it so well hidden you couldn't tell from the photograph level. Unfortunately, our task force doesn't have a cargo of marines who can be assigned the duty of taking the atoll and telling us what's there.

So Mike and I do some figuring and make a pitch.

"WE came aboard this carrier in an official naval aircraft on an authorized flight," I tell the skipper, stretching it there a bit. "For reasons best known to you, it is inadvisable to send engine-propelled aircraft on this mission. Our craft is the answer. We can steal in, corral the data and get it back to you. All you have to do is to get us to the windward side of the atoll and cast us off."

"But you haven't got wings," says a gold-braider who has. His tone is distinctly down-the-nose. "What right do you have to go on such a mission without wings? This is a job for Naval Aviators (you could hear the capital letters), and by what stretch of the . . . (he was full of cliches) . . . do you—you ground officers consider yourselves qualified for such a mission? I say no."

We have the word on this joker, and we're ready for him. "But, sir, one member of our crew has wings."

"So? Who is he?"

"It's not a he. Name's Margo."

"A Wave aboard!" He all but pops a gusset.

Mike steps out the door and reappears immediately with Margo, our carrier pigeon.

"This is no joking matter!" the joker starts to bite my head off.

"No joke meant, sir. We can land Betsy on Buka, reconnoiter, buckle the dope onto Margo, let her fly back to the boat—I mean, ship—and then, if we can't get away we would just have to be expended. (We were playing it forlorn.) Surely this operation is worth a couple of expendable reserves."

I can see the idea makes a hit with Annapolis, and after a hurried, heated, whispered conference at the other end of the table, our friend with wings is not opposed to our being expendable.

The dusk patrol checks the wind for us, and after dark we're on deck with a couple of hundred men holding Betsy down as we fill her with hydrogen which we made by the simple process of taking the H_2 out of water. We tried to talk the management out of some of the helium supply that's carried along for the aerology balloons they send up every day to see how the wind and atmosphere are getting along. Nothing doing. If we're going to be heroes, we're going to be heroes the hard way. We're going to war with hydrogen, which is highly inflammable—no safe, sissy helium for us . . . These boys are taking that expendable gag too seriously.

We fill Betsy to her capacity and load her basket with plenty of ballast: hand grenades instead of sand, a couple of good flashlights, Margo, the roll of tissue, a small mirror, chocolate bars, .45 pistols, long knives, a rubber life raft and other odds and ends. With all the truck and the two of us, she is just a bit light, with enough lift to rise with the long rope we attach to the basket.

A destroyer pulls up alongside. The rope is passed to it, pulled taut, and before we know it we're off the deck, floating along a hundred feet or so above the destroyer, which is towing us towards a point on the horizon behind which Buka lies in wait for us.

It takes us a couple of hours to get in position, and it's quite dark when the destroyer casts us off and leaves us to the mercy of the wind. We can see the dark island, and before long we can hear the breakers polishing the coral reefs.

At this point the whole idea seems like one we never should have brought up.

We're scared shivering when we cross the white water, but we valve off enough gas to let us sink to within a hundred feet or so of the tops of the coconut palms. The breeze is light, but we float along at a steady clip, maybe ten miles an hour or so. We can't see much, but we can hear plenty. Of course, Mike and I know nothing about the lingo of the Jap, but we hear voices. The rat-men have hung palm fronds between the trees, half way up them, completely hiding everything they have stored underneath.

WE have this island figured as a gasoline and ammunition dump. If the winds take us over the dump, we are going to toss over a handful of grenades, hold our ears, rise into the heavens by the lightened load, and be bumped higher by the explosions. If we don't locate the dump, we are to jot down what we do see, send the intelligence back with Margo, land in the sea well beyond the island and break out the rubber boat. Annapolis and Associates have promised to look for us the next morning.

We can't see a thing through the palm-frond roof, so we have no dope for Margo to take back to the carrier. All we know is that there's a lot of something under there, but we have no idea what it is. We decide to go down and find out, and we valve off a bit more gas so we'll sink. Mike ties the rope around his body, perches on the edge of the basket and gets ready to hop off, while I get ready to rip her if necessary, because as soon as he jumps and his weight leaves the basket, Betsy is going to shoot skyward. We don't want to rip her unless we have to because we want to save the hydrogen and keep Betsy in operating condition. The success of the idea depends on Mike's getting something to tie onto almost as soon as he hits the beach.

We're past the palms and fast running out of island, and Mike is still perched on the leading edge of the basket, with nothing in sight to anchor to. We're about ten feet off the sand, and the gentle rhythm of the waves becomes suspense music. A lone pine appears, almost dead ahead. Betsy is going to pass by close aboard. Mike jumps.

I look down at him as he rolls in the sand. Betsy and I are zipping up. If Betsy gets away from him, I'll rip her, no matter how high we are—I try to tell myself. Mike rolls up to the tree, spins around the trunk a couple of times, and Betsy jerks to a stop with a helluva yank as the last foot of rope pays out. I keep on going up and get fouled up in the lines—fortunately, because otherwise I would have shot out into space. I flop back into the basket. Mike has us anchored.

It takes Mike a few minutes to pick himself up, fit his joints together again and peer around for Japs. I'm sitting up at the end of the rope, a pushover for any sniper who might happen to notice Betsy blocking out his view of the stars. I hear Mike prowling, and I'm convinced his emergency landing did not splinter him. Easily, gently, Betsy and I sink closer to the beach as Mike pulls us down.

We secure Betsy to the tree, fill our shirts with grenades and Margo, and creep into the jungle.

We go about five hundred yards, I'd guess, when we come up against a metallic wall—drums and tins of gasoline and oil. We back up just in time to keep out of sight of the

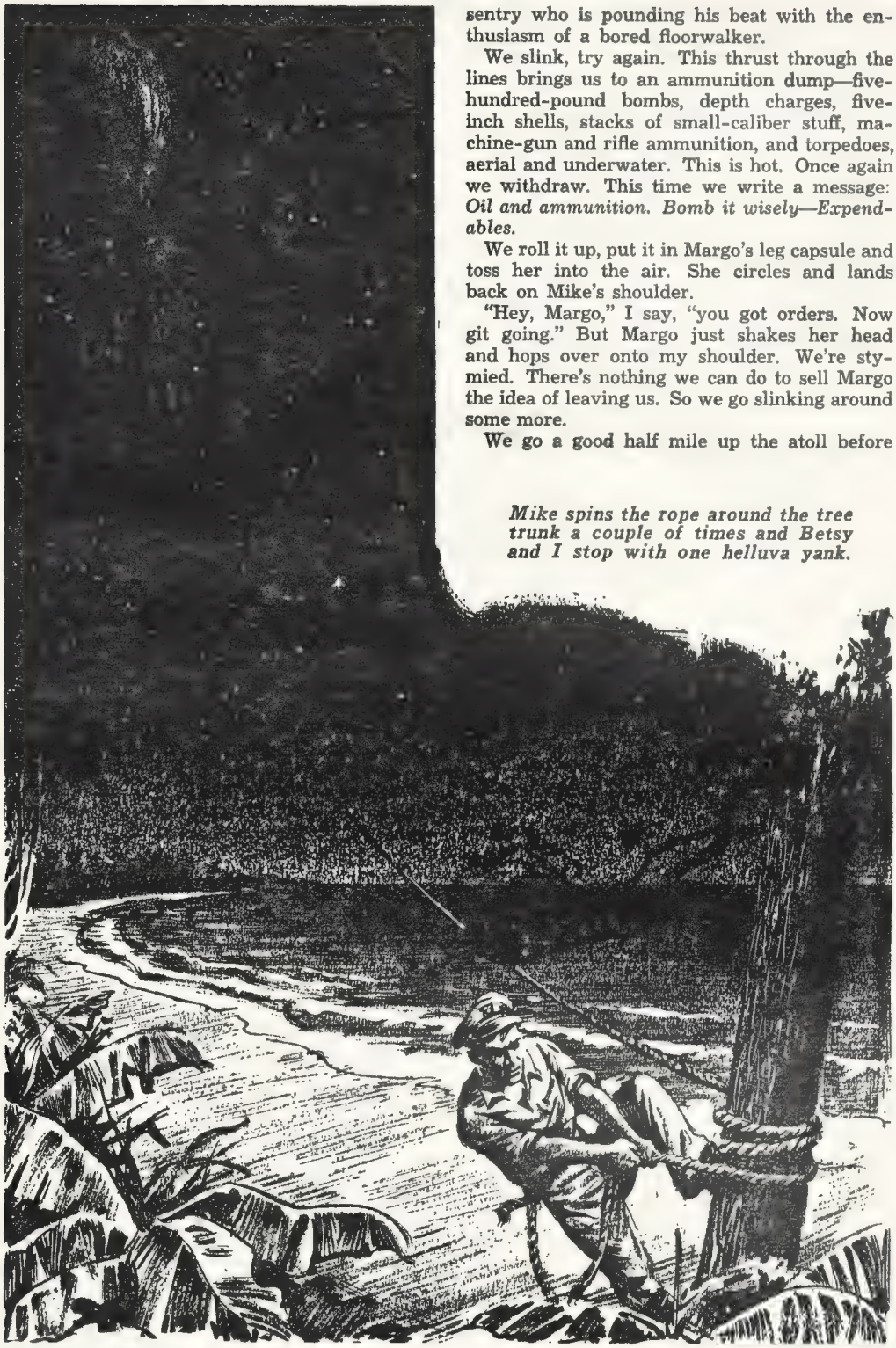
sentry who is pounding his beat with the enthusiasm of a bored floorwalker.

We slink, try again. This thrust through the lines brings us to an ammunition dump—five-hundred-pound bombs, depth charges, five-inch shells, stacks of small-caliber stuff, machine-gun and rifle ammunition, and torpedoes, aerial and underwater. This is hot. Once again we withdraw. This time we write a message: *Oil and ammunition. Bomb it wisely—Expendables.*

We roll it up, put it in Margo's leg capsule and toss her into the air. She circles and lands back on Mike's shoulder.

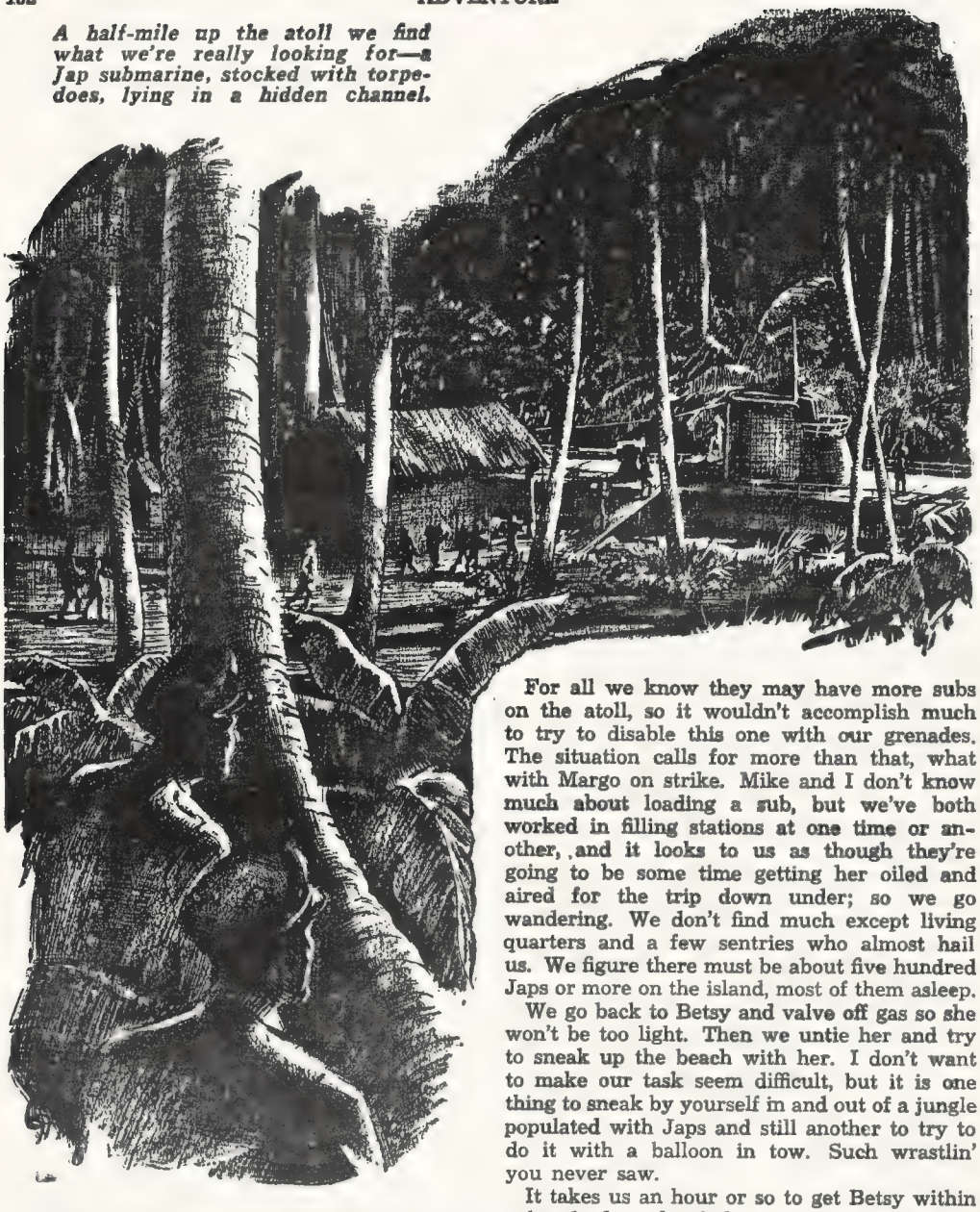
"Hey, Margo," I say, "you got orders. Now git going." But Margo just shakes her head and hops over onto my shoulder. We're stymied. There's nothing we can do to sell Margo the idea of leaving us. So we go slinking around some more.

We go a good half mile up the atoll before



Mike spins the rope around the tree trunk a couple of times and Betsy and I stop with one helluva yank.

A half-mile up the atoll we find what we're really looking for—a Jap submarine, stocked with torpedoes, lying in a hidden channel.



we find what we're really looking for. The Japs have covered a narrow channel between two coral reefs, and in this channel, refueled and restocked with torpedoes, lies a submarine. We can tell by the excitement that the Japs know our task force is nearby, and they're loading up to go out and get a crack at the carrier.

We look at Margo pleadingly, but she just shakes her head and digs her claws deeper into Mike's shoulder, where she's riding.

For all we know they may have more subs on the atoll, so it wouldn't accomplish much to try to disable this one with our grenades. The situation calls for more than that, what with Margo on strike. Mike and I don't know much about loading a sub, but we've both worked in filling stations at one time or another, and it looks to us as though they're going to be some time getting her oiled and aired for the trip down under; so we go wandering. We don't find much except living quarters and a few sentries who almost hail us. We figure there must be about five hundred Japs or more on the island, most of them asleep.

We go back to Betsy and valve off gas so she won't be too light. Then we untie her and try to sneak up the beach with her. I don't want to make our task seem difficult, but it is one thing to sneak by yourself in and out of a jungle populated with Japs and still another to try to do it with a balloon in tow. Such wrastlin' you never saw.

It takes us an hour or so to get Betsy within a hundred yards of the sub. We hide her as best we can behind some tall palms and go foraging into the ammunition dump. It takes us quite a while to find what we're looking for, and it is nearly morning when we finish the job of hanging a depth bomb on Betsy's basket in place of her ballast bags.

By this time the sub is deserted except for one sleepy guard, and it isn't too much of a trick to swim up the hidden channel, keeping in the shadows, and fasten Betsy's rope to the stern of the sub.

We've valved off so much gas that Betsy won't lift us both, with the depth charge and the extra rope we've found in the ammunition dump. So Mike takes the rubber raft, a pistol, a shirtful of grenades and assumes command of our ground forces while I assume command of the air. We have a plan.

I climb into Betsy's basket, and by paying out the rope little by little I'm soon floating above the sub, well hidden from below by the palm fronds. Mike starts our war.

Betsy and I are a good five hundred feet in the air when the first grenade explodes in among the oil drums. According to plan, Mike has tossed a couple of grenades before legging it for the beach. They have the desired effect. All hell breaks loose in the living quarters. You never heard such screeching and squalling; I wish I could have understood it. Then, just as we'd expected, the sub starts to move. Of course, Betsy, who is pretty creaky in the joints by now from dragging along the big bomb, follows. I give in to an impulse and heave a grenade as hard as I can towards the squalling Japs. It works its way down through the palm fronds. Boom! The screaming that tells me I haven't missed is most satisfying.

As we clear the channel and move away from the atoll, another grenade goes *whammo!* right where the ammunition dump was. Mike must have run towards the dump instead of the beach and tossed one in among the warheads and five-hundred-pound bombs, the nervy s.o.b. The havoc that follows that exploding grenade shakes the Pacific for miles around. It must lay every living soul on that atoll flatter than a flight deck. Brother, what banging!

The dry palm fronds flame up over the entire island like some fantastic Broadway neon sign. Every few seconds an exploding bomb or warhead geysers flame a thousand feet or more, and the reflection flickers on the water. A case of machine-gun tracers go, and the sky is streaked for a few seconds. The whole effect would been most acceptable to Cecil B. DeMille.

When the dawn becomes light enough to see by, smoke's still rising from the fire on one horizon while the ships in our task force are creeping along the other. It's time to get to work.

Before we attached the rope to the sub, we tied a strip of cloth along the rope at what we figured was the twenty-five-foot mark and another at the fifty-foot mark. They are to tell me how deep the sub is. I can see the fifty-foot marker just above the water, and from the wake the rope is leaving, I figure we're heading in the general direction of our ships at about five or six knots.

I valve a little gas and pull in rope until Betsy is about a hundred feet above the surface. Then I tie the depth charge to the end of the rope I have in the basket, run the rope down one side of the basket, underneath it, and up again, giving me a block and tackle effect that will enable me to lower the heavy bomb slowly. It takes me awhile to figure how to set the fuse gadget, but I finally set it to go off when old sub-buster is twenty-five feet under water. I start to lower it, but it sways like all get-out. Betsy doesn't like all this pulling anyway, and the swaying gives her the jerks. For a minute it looks as though I'm going to have to cut the bomb loose and give up the whole idea. Then the sub rises to periscope depth. The periscope breaks the surface and she levels off. Our ships are ahead and the Japs spot them right off and don't look carefully astern. As a result they apparently don't notice the rope. We continue on towards the task force, or rather to an intercepting point ahead of the ships, which I figure must have noticed Betsy.

I don't want to flash a message because any answer they might give might tip the Japs off that something's up. I'm only afraid they may flash some tip-off even before I do anything, and I'm just about to start to dit and dah with a flashlight when the light on one of the cruisers starts in. Of course, I can't keep up with the lad on the blinker, but I get enough to figure out he's asking, "Where are you going?"

"Look sharp," I flash back, "and you'll notice it's not downwind, or where've you been all morning?"

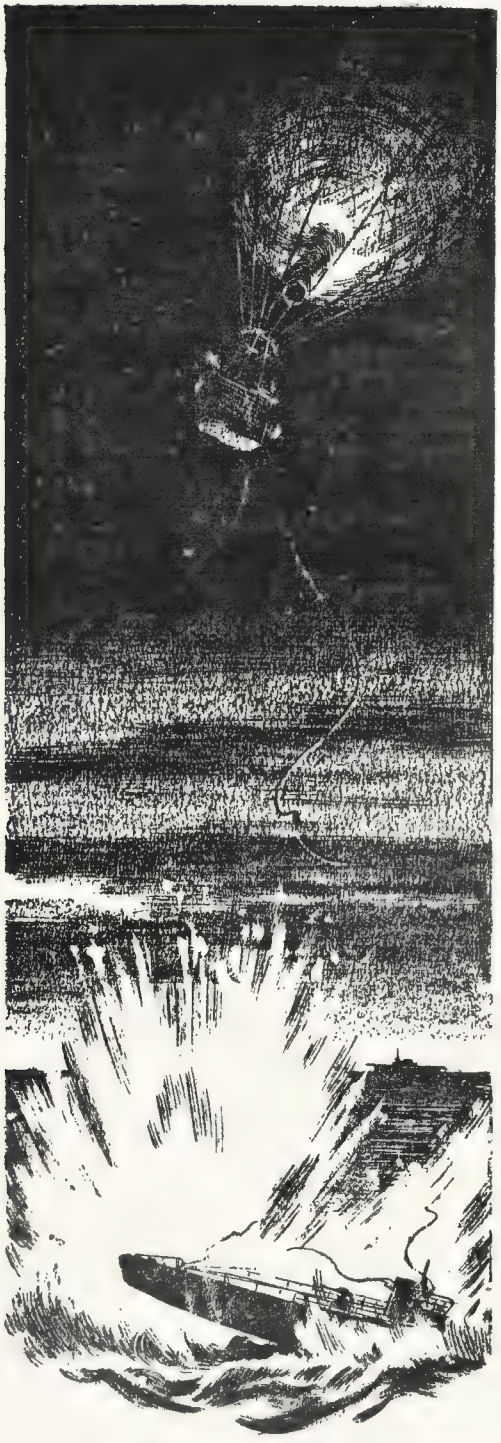
Suddenly blinkers on every ship I can see, including the carrier, start flashing at me.

"If you all talk at once," I try to interrupt, "we won't get anywhere. Why don't you just send me a few planes equipped with depth charges and see if we can keep Tojo from putting a fish into the carrier?"

That takes a long time at the speed with which I make with the dots and dashes, and we are almost within range of the carrier. Way off beyond the ships I spot a couple of torpedo planes, probably armed with depth charges, heading our way, and I begin to feel better—so much better I don't notice Betsy rise, at first.

Apparently, all that flashing by all the ships has been seen by the Jap eye at the periscope, and he's decided to come up and find out what it's all about. Anyway, I look down just in time to see the conning tower and the long dark deck of the sub rise out of the water.

The hatch of the conning tower opens and a rat climbs out with a sub-machine gun under his arm. I pull the pin out of a grenade and try to drop it on him. He ducks. The grenade drops through the open hatch and explodes inside the sub with a helluva blast. Brother Rat is slowed down a moment, but he's back on the job. By the time he recovers and has his sights on me, I've counted to six (three more than I should) and I toss the grenade gently towards him. There's no ducking this



I cut the rope just as the bottom of the basket hits the water, and Betsy shoots skyward like a rocket.

one. It explodes in the air right over him, and he's washed up. But more rat-men are climbing up the ladder and in a few seconds—before those planes can get there—they'll mow me down. I do the only thing left to do. I whip out my long knife and slash the rope that's holding the depth charge.

THAT depth charge drifts slowly downward, or so it seems to me, and enters the water close to the sub. Then the hours seem to tick away while the charge sinks to twenty-five feet. It probably takes only three or four seconds to go off, but it seems as though I'd have plenty of time to run a mile before the big bang gives Betsy and me a kick in the pants. Of course, I don't just sit there and wait for it. I keep tossing grenades at the rats who are trying to take potshots at poor old Betsy. One burst of tracers into her hydrogen and the story would end here and now. My job is to keep those hissing Japs down there (really, I could hear them hiss) from getting in that burst. Because they can't miss if they once get their guns working. I never knew it was possible to pull pins with your teeth and pitch grenades with both hands so fast. There isn't a half-second interval between explosions. They never get off a shot at Betsy.

I don't stop pitching grenades until the water spout from the depth charge belts me for a loop. When I pick myself up from the bottom of the basket and peer over the side, we are being pulled down fast. In a second or two we'll go under, sure. The sub has been shattered by the charge and is pulling us down with it. I find the knife, draw it from its holster with the speed of a Zane Grey ranger and cut that rope just as the bottom of the basket hits the water.

Betsy takes off and shoots skyward like a rocket. Remember, she isn't moored any longer, and she's dropped 325 pounds of ballast in the depth charge, not to mention the grenades I've tossed into the fray. As we climb higher and higher with every second, the wind starts drifting us back towards the island. Tired old Betsy has climbed to about a thousand feet and is not more than three hundred yards downwind from the oil slick and debris the sub has left on the surface, when the two torpedo planes arrive over the spot and drop their charges. Four beautiful geysers climb up out of the Pacific (they're pretty when you're not too close to them), but by that time the sub is on the bottom giving up its last air bubbles.

I see a destroyer leave the pack and start after us. I valve off some gas and Betsy stops rising; I valve off more, and she starts to lose altitude. The destroyer is making more knots than the wind, so I decide to get down as close

(Continued on page 146)

ASK ADVENTURE

Information you can't get elsewhere

THE R.C.M.P.'s old weapon.

Query:—In 1888 I bought a rifle from William Lee, of Duke Center, Pa. He claimed it was a .45-75 made for the Mounted Police of Canada and not for sale in the United States. The only marks on the gun are on the barrel (Kings Improvement, Winchester Repeating Arms, New Haven, Conn. Pat. March 20, 1866, Oct. 16th, 1880). The barrel is round, blue, 28-inch, 16-shot. Weight 9 lbs. Pocket in bottom of stock for jointed cleaning rod. Brass pocket in side of stock for tallow. For thirty years I bought bottle-neck shells, marked .45-75. My son had the gun in Ohio and a gun expert told him it was not made for a .45 shell and was very dangerous. I think I fired it over 1000 times.

I have stated all the particulars I have on my gun and I would be pleased to know what you know about such a weapon.

—C. S. Radcliff,
2820 Shawhan Ave.,
(Brookline) Pittsburgh, Pa.

Reply by Donegan Wiggins:—I know quite a bit about those old Centennial Model Winchester carbines, for I own a pair of them myself.

They were first put out, I understand, especially for the then-new Northwest Mounted, and seem to have been used by them until the adoption of the present rifle, the S.M.L.E. .303, from what little I can learn of the Force's armament history. Some other arm may have intervened, but I can't learn of such a matter.

These old Centennial, or Model 1876 Winchester, carbines, were good and sturdy arms for their day, and the killing power of the old .45-75 cartridge was excellent. I fired one of my own carbines a bit, some years since, about 1937 as I recall it, and found it working all right, but it looked like Paul Bunyan was lighting his pipe when the smoke rolled along from its muzzle.

If the two links are in place, you need not fear to use the rifle, if loaded with the original factory charge; the expert who told you the rifle was unsafe was all wet, in my personal opinion. Winchester does NOT put out ammunition dangerous to use, in their arms or any others. I have long wondered how some of the men who advise people on firearms get the information they impart, and where.

I may add that the old .45-75 was the favorite heavy rifle of the late Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, while he lived in North Dakota in the Eighties of the past century. He spoke highly of his rifle, and its effect on grizzly bear, I recall. I have two carbines, and a standard rifle of this model and caliber in my personal collection. Old, but reliable still.

COMPARATIVE swimming speeds in short and long pools—fresh and salt water.

Query:—Why do swimmers make faster time in short pools than in long, and what do you estimate the approximate gain?

What makes some pools faster than others?

Is there any difference in the speed obtainable in fresh and salt water?

—Robert Boucher,
211 Fern Ave.,
Toronto, Ont.

Reply by Louis De B. Handley:—Swimmers make faster time in short pools than in long because the push-off taken after each turn affords an advantage. The speed gained from the push-off is greater, for a short distance, than that obtained from swimming. Experiments have indicated that the swimmer profits from the push-off until he attains a pace of close to 50 sec-

(Continued on page 145)

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Send each question *direct* to the expert in charge of the section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **Do Not** send questions to the magazine. Be definite; explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question. The magazine does not assume any responsibility. **No Reply** will be made to requests for partners, financial backing or employment.

★*(Enclose addressed envelope with International Reply Coupon)*

Notice: Many of our *Ask Adventure* experts are now engaged in government service of one kind or another. Some are on active duty in the Army or Navy, others serving in an executive or advisory capacity on various of the boards and offices that have been set up to hasten the nation's war effort. Almost without exception these men have consented to remain on our staff, carry on their work for the magazine if humanly possible, but with the understanding that for the duration such work is of secondary importance to their official duties. This is as it should be, so when you don't receive answers to queries as promptly as you have in the past, please be patient. And remember that foreign mails are slow and uncertain these days, many curtailed drastically. Bear with us and we'll continue to try to serve you as speedily as possible.

ASK ADVENTURE EXPERTS

SPORTS AND HOBBIES

Archery—EARL B. POWELL, care of *Adventure.*

Baseball—FREDERICK LIEB, care of *Adventure.*

Basketball—STANLEY CARHART, 99 Broad St., Matawan, N. J.

Big Game Hunting in North America: *Guides and equipment*—A. H. CARHART, c/o *Adventure.*

Boxing—COL. JOHN V. GROMBACH, care of *Adventure.*

Camping—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Canoeing: *Paddling, sailing, cruising, regattas*—EDGAR S. PERKINS, 1325 So. Main St., Princeton, Ill.

Coins and Medals—WILLIAM L. CLARK, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., N. Y. C.

Dogs—FREEMAN LLOYD, care of *Adventure.*

Fencing—COL. JOHN V. GROMBACH, care of *Adventure.*

First Aid—DR. CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, care of *Adventure.*

Fishing: *Fresh water; fly and bait casting; bait casting outfits; fishing trips*—JOHN ALDEN KNIGHT, 929 W. 4th St., Williamsport, Penna.

Fishing, Salt water: *Bottom fishing, surf casting; trolling; equipment and locations*—C. BLACKBURN MILLER, care of *Adventure.*

Fly and Bait Casting, Tournament—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Maine.

Globe-trotting and Vagabonding — ROBERT SPIERS BENJAMIN, care of *Adventure.*

Health-Building Activities, Hiking — DR. CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, care of *Adventure.*

Motor Boating—GERALD T. WHITE, Montville, N. J.

Motorcycling: *Regulations, mechanics, racing*—CHARLES M. DODGE, care of *Adventure.*

Mountain Climbing—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 952 No. Hudson Ave., Hollywood, Calif.

Old Songs—ROBERT WHITE, 913 W. 7th St., Los Angeles, Calif.

Rifles, Pistols, Revolvers: *Foreign and American*—DONEGAN WIGGINS, 170 Liberty Rd., Salem, Oregon.

Shotguns, American and Foreign: Wing Shooting and Field Trails—ROY S. TINNEY, care of *Adventure.*

Small Boating: *Skiffs, outboard, small launch, river and lake cruising*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

Swimming—LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 115 West 11th St., N. Y., N. Y.

Swords, Spears, Pole Arms and Armor—MAJOR R. E. GARDNER, care of *Adventure.*

Track—JACKSON SCHOLZ, R. D. No. 1, Doylestown, Pa.

Woodcraft—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Wrestling—MURL E. THRUSH, New York Athletic Club, 59th St. and 7th Ave., N. Y., N. Y.

Yachting—A. R. KNAUER, 6720 Jeffery Ave., Chicago, Ill.

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

Anthropology: *American, north of the Panama Canal, customs, dress, architecture; pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Calif.

Aviation: *Airplanes, airships, airways and landing fields, contests, aero clubs, insurance, laws, licenses, operating data, schools, foreign activities, publications, parachutes, gliders*—MAJOR FALK HARMEL, 709 Longfellow St., Washington, D. C.

Entomology: *Insects and spiders; venomous and disease-carrying insects*—DR. S. W. FROST, 465 E. Foster Ave., State College, Penna.

Forestry, North American: *The U. S. Forestry Service, our national forests, conservation and use*—A. H. CARHART, c/o *Adventure.*

Forestry, Tropical: *Tropical forests and products*—WM. R. BARBOUR, care of U. S. Forest Service, Glenn Bldg., Atlanta, Ga.

Herpetology: *Reptiles and amphibians*—CLIFFORD H. POPE, care of *Adventure.*

Mining, Prospecting, and Precious Stones: *Anywhere in North America. Outfitting; any mineral, metallic or non-metallic*—VICTOR SHAW, care of *Adventure*.

Ornithology: *Birds; their habits and distribution*—DAVIS QUINN, 5 Minerva Pl., Bronx, N. Y.

Photography: *Outfitting, work in out-of-the-way places; general information*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, N. J.

Radio: *Telegraphy, telephony, history, receiver construction, portable sets*—DONALD MCNICOL, care of *Adventure*.

Railroads: *In the United States, Mexico and Canada*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill.

Sawmilling—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care of *Adventure*.

Sunken Treasure: *Treasure ships; deep-sea diving; salvage operations and equipment*—LIEUTENANT HARRY E. RIESENBERG, care of *Adventure*.

Taxidermy—EDWARD B. LANG, 156 Joralemon St., Belleville, N. J.

Wildcrafting and Trapping—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

MILITARY, NAVAL AND POLICE

Federal Investigation Activities: *Secret Service, etc.*—FRANCIS H. BENT, care of *Adventure*.

The Merchant Marine—GORDON MACALLISTER, care of *Adventure*.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police—ALEC CAVADAS, King Edward High School, Vancouver, B. C.

State Police—FRANCIS H. BENT, care of *Adventure*.

U. S. Marine Corps—LIEUT. COL. F. W. HOPKINS, care of *Adventure*.

U. S. Navy—LIEUTENANT DURAND KIEFER, care of *Adventure*.

GEOGRAPHICAL SUBJECTS

Philippine Islands—BUCK CONNER, Conner Field, Quartzsite, Ariz.

★New Guinea—L. P. B. ARMIT, care of *Adventure*.

★New Zealand, Cook Island, Samoa—TOM L. MILLS, 27 Bowen St., Feilding, New Zealand.

★Australia and Tasmania—ALAN FOLEY, 248 Elizabeth St., Sydney, Australia.

★South Sea Islands—WILLIAM MCCREADIE, No. 1 Flat "Scarborough," 83 Sidney Rd., N. S. W., Australia.

Hawaii—JOHN SNELL, Deputy Administrator, Defense Savings Staff, 1055 Bishop St., Honolulu, T. H.

Madagascar—RALPH LINTON, Dept. of Anthropology, Columbia University, N. Y., N. Y.

Africa, Part 1 ★*Libya, Morocco, Egypt, Tunis, Algeria, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*—CAPT. H. W. EADES, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C. **2** *Abyssinia, Italian Somaliland, British Somali Coast Protectorate, Eritrea, Uganda, Tanganyika, Kenya*—GORDON MACCREAGH, 2231 W. Harbor Drive, St. Petersburg, Florida. **3** *Tripoli, Sahara caravans*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, care of *Adventure*. **4** *Bechuanaland, Southwest Africa, Angola, Belgian Congo, Egyptian Sudan and French West Africa*—MAJOR S. L. GLENISTER, care of *Adventure*. **5** ★*Cape Province, Orange Free State, Natal, Zululand, Transvaal, Rhodesia*—PETER FRANKLIN, Box 1491, Durban, Natal, So. Africa.

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Alaska—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 952 No. Hudson Ave., Hollywood, Calif.

Western U. S., Part 1 *Pacific Coast States*—FRANK WINCH, care of *Adventure*. **3** *New Mexico; Indians, etc.*—H. F. ROBINSON, 1211 W. Roma Ave., Albuquerque, N. M. **4** *Nevada, Montana and Northern Rockies*—FRED W. EGELSTON, Elks' Home, Elko, Nev. **5** *Idaho and environs*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill. **6** *Arizona, Utah*—C. C. ANDERSON, care of *Adventure*. **7** *Texas, Oklahoma*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex.

Middle Western U. S., Part 2 *Ohio River and Tributaries and Mississippi River*—GEO. A. ZERR, 31 Cannon St., Pittsburgh, 5, Penna. **3** *Lower Mississippi from St. Louis down, Louisiana swamps, St. Francis, Arkansas Bottom*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

Eastern U. S., Part 1 *Maine*—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Me. **2** *Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I., Mass.*—HOWARD R. VOIGHT, 40 Chapel St., Woodmont, Conn. **3** *Adirondacks, New York*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif. **4** *New Jersey*—F. H. BENT, care of *Adventure*. **5** *Ala., Tenn., Miss., N. C., S. C., Fla. Ga.*—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care of *Adventure*. **6** *The Great Smokies and Appalachian Mountains south of Virginia*—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

(Continued from page 125)

O'Hara held a glass of wine to the light.

"You've no idea, sir," he observed with relish, "how thirsty a man gets dangling to a yardarm in the sun! But Blake, now— After dark, tonight, I slipped down to the deck and told a seaman, in an officers voice, that Master Walton would speak to Mr. Blake. And when he came on deck from the petty officer's quarters, I tapped him on the head and rapt him aloft with me."

" 'Twould ha' been a good deed to hang him," said Dorothy's father vengefully. "But you said you didn't harm him—"

"Dear man!" said O'Hara reproachfully. "How could I leave him to swear away the lives of loyal gentlemen who had tried with me to serve the king? I took him out on a yardarm and put a noose about his neck—"

"Excellent!" said Dorothy's father, in relief.

"And another about my own," said O'Hara imperturbably. "In preparation I'd stolen a couple of bottles of rum—you've no idea, sir, how handy 'tis to've had a father stingy with his liquor—an' when Blake opened his eyes I offered him to drink. I explained to him soft but sincere that only one of us could go down to the deck again, and that I'd push him off the yardarm did he cry out. And then I explained that we'd drink turn about. The scoundrel was mortal scared, sir, but he could do nought but agree. 'Twould ha' been cheerful enough with a boon companion, takin' alternate swigs at the rum with nooses about our necks and moonlight on the sea. I nearly warmed to him. By d'ye know, sir, the scoundrel cheated!"

Dorothy's father stared at O'Hara.

"For God's sake, O'Hara—"

"The scut almost had me tipsy," said O'Hara indignantly, "before he toppled over! So he's hangin' to a yardarm along with the poor devils he murdered. I misdoubt Walton will find him till he counts the men he hanged and finds there's one too many. So you, sir, are safe enough, and there'll be no sorry tale to vex the King because our scheme to make him rich miscarried."

Dorothy's father sighed in relief.

"Then we've only to get you safe away, and quickly—"

O'Hara reached over and took possession of one of Dorothy's hands. He patted it with a proprietary air.

"There's a prophecy," he told her warmly," that my half-witted nurse made. It said I'd hang at a yardarm and after live as the happiest of men. And your blessed father knows that if you don't marry me there'll be no chance of the last comin' true, and I'll just walk down to Master Walton and give myself up, in my sorrow, an' God knows what will happen with me in the trial box—"

Dorothy's father swore abruptly. But Dorothy smiled. Her eyes were very bright and very soft indeed.

"I wish," said O'Hara confidentially," that the old gentleman would go away an' arrange for our sailin'. An' I'd like it if he'd arrange the weddin' prompt, an' get the captain's cabin with stern-windows so we can watch the wake together, an'—"

"Damn you, O'Hara!" groaned Dorothy's father. "This is blackmail!"

"Dear man!" protested O'Hara. "It's nothin' o' the sort! It's prophecy!"

(Continued from page 8)

ing wells. In vast reservoirs, natural or the remnants of sumps, millions of barrels of contaminated oil lay rotting. An old friend who was my host, John G. Towns of Nixon and Dallas, Texas, was backing a German scientist in a new cracking process designed to salvage some of this debris-thickened oil.

Any revolutionary movement, in any country, is bound to include wild excesses here and there, and it is no disgrace to the people or country of Mexico, past or present, that their movement was at times excessive in its zeal. The fact that the oil companies backed an army of their own to protect them from various other armies—ranging in size from bandit groups to sizable collections of men—was merely self-defense. One army revolted against the government, then a smaller army would revolt against the first outfit, and on occasion became Federal again just to whip the original revolutionists.

I have collapsed these events into months.

Already in *Camp-Fire* (the May '44 issue) the career of Monte Michaels has been touched upon in some detail by myself and our knowledgeable correspondent, G. E. Niver, of Pittsburgh. To summarize: he got some acreage, and brought in a well against great handicaps placed upon him by big companies who had a personal dislike for him and his bully-boy methods. After denying him right of way into his acreage, refusing him water, etc., all of which he and his men surmounted by strongarm methods, they refused to handle his oil after he'd struck it. Whereupon Mr. Michaels started robbing their payrolls of the amount he conceived he had been swindled out of. It is my recollection that at one hectic period he stole seven tons of machinery off the Tampico docks.

He didn't stop when he'd recouped his losses. His climactic act of banditry was to blow up a train carrying a lot of gold—or which he thought carried a lot of gold. I believe that more than a hundred people were killed, although possibly it was less. Anyhow, plenty. I asked a driller who had been a friend of Monte's whether he thought Michaels had blown up that train.

"I'd hate to say," the driller replied. "If he did, he didn't intend to kill anybody. That was the work of so-and-so," naming a half breed second-in-command whose name I forget, but which probably many old-time oil men readers will recollect.

So you see that in tying up Jingle Bill and the actual events which are the basis of my fictionalization, I am not too far from the actual truth. Monte was worshipped by all Mexicans because of what he was doing to the oil companies, and had tie-ins with alleged revolutionary bands all over the fields. According to the best information I could obtain by conscientious investigation, he was killed on his way to become a revolutionary leader at the head of nearly three hundred men.

He came to the door of an elderly gatekeeper on the Huasteca Ranch—a huge inland empire which was sold to Standard later for $299,000,000—and announced that he was requisitioning more than two hundred horses, and that he was on the way to join the revolution. This gatekeeper never opened the door. He blasted away through it with a shotgun, and there died Monte Michaels, just a few days before he might have done what Jingle Bill does in my story.

As for other little sidelights which might be of interest as a background to the making of a tale: the original of Huabrache is Quebrache, which I have described exactly save for the addition of a mill; a wild well such as I have described was only a mile away, part of a cluster of wells around a Texas pumping station located near Quebrache; the oil companies did start trying to fly their payrolls through the fields to escape Monte's machinations; and in almost every paragraph truth is so intertwined with fiction that it would be hard to disentangle them. Any one who was there has spent many a jovial and expensive hour in El Suiza and the Louisian, and gazed with pious horror at the redlighted car leaving for the Union, wondering what manner of person would be a passenger on it.

One last word. In most situations in life both sides are a little right and a little wrong. The fact that Mexicans resented the fabulous fortunes being dragged out of their own earth is understandable, as is the fact that the oil companies felt themselves benefactors of the country by doing for the country what it could not do for itself for many years to come. Conflict was inevitable, whether or not the share Mexico got was a little too small or a little too big, depending on the point of view. I do not see how it could have been avoided, under the circumstances, as long as human nature is human nature.

MR. G. E. Niver of Pittsburgh, that "knowledgeable correspondent" Author Burtis mentions above, writes to us again to get in on the discussion inaugurated by Jack Saunders in the August issue. Saunders, you will recall, expressed doubt that rotary rigs were used in the Oklahoma oil fields as early as Burtis had indicated in "The War of the Wildcats," which we published in the January issue and to which "Jingle Bill" is a sequel. Now the following—

The *Camp-Fire* discussion in the last issue of *Adventure* as to when rotary rigs were first introduced in Oklahoma was extremely interesting to me. Luckily I have access to a file of old oil field equipment catalogs and immediately made an investigation as well as talking to a few veteran "supply men."

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The Spindletop Texas field was drilled in 1901 with rotary rigs but the first catalog to list rotary equipment was printed in 1907. A special rotary catalog was printed in 1911.

To the best of their memories the old timers say rotary rigs were first used in Oklahoma around Ada in the early "teens," possibly 1912 or 1913. They were introduced into central Oklahoma in both Bristow and Okemah fields either in 1922 or 1923 but were not entirely successful due to difficulty in keeping the fishtail bits to gauge—this was before the days of "hard facing." The first extensive use of rotaries in this area was in Tonkawa in 1923 where rock bits were widely used—thus overcoming this trouble. The Tonkawa boom followed closely on the heels of those of Bristow and Okemah so it is possible that the dates cited might be off by a few months.

Combination rigs, i.e. rigs using both rotary and cable tools, were at one time used fairly widely but mechanical improvements in rotary equipment has made them practically obsolete, although they still may be in use in certain areas. With regard to the difference of opinions about derrick heights it is interesting to note that the special rotary catalog printed in 1911 lists a 106 foot steel derrick.

I hope that the foregoing information may help in clearing up the questioned points. Undoubtedly there are a number of old timers still living around Ada or Tulsa who can check up more exactly the introduction date of rotaries into Oklahoma.

AND Hardy Roberts of Pasadena, Texas, another old time oil man, spotted the beginning of the controversy and steps up to the fire to add his bit. He writes—

I note the criticism of Mr. Burtis' "War of the Wild Cats" by Jack Saunders of Kansas, and your asking for the opinion of some of the old timers. Believe that I would classify as I drilled for more than thirty years, and believe that I can give you some accurate data.

The first rotary rigs were made at Corsicane, Texas by Mr. Johnson and the first well drilled with a rotary rig that was over 200 feet deep was the noted Lucas gusher on Spindle Top just out of Beaumont in 1901, and completed just after Xmas 1902, by Hammel Bros. Al Hammel about two years or less ago, gave the complete history of this well in the San Antonio *Sunday Light*. I came to Spindle Top in June 1902 and the field was covered with rotary rigs, also many cables, but the cable was not a success there as there was so much sand and water near the surface.

In the summer of 1903, Cap Newton and Si Bell shipped two rigs (rotary) from Jennings, La. to Cal. and some years la-

ter, 1909 in fact, I spent several days with Cap Newton who had come back to New Mexico and was drilling for artesian water near Artesia; I learned that he died the following year. In 1917, I was in San Francisco and saw Si Bell listed in the phone book as Superintendent of the Standard Oil Co. there. He was not in so I did not get to see him but I am sure these facts can be verified by Standard records.

I built rigs for a while when I first went to the field and the height of them was always governed by necessity. About 66 ft. for cable tools and 72 for rotary at that time, but they very soon started building higher, and by 1905 there were many building 84 and 96 ft. derricks. I believe that ones over 100 came in general use about 1917 though the over-100 steel derrick came much later. I was in Oklahoma in '22 and found most derricks steel and about 50-50 rotary and cable rigs running.

I believe I carried the first rotary rig to India which was in 1912 right where the new Ledo Road is starting now; spent two years there and spent '16 and '17, or most of '17, in Russia (Baku).

I shipped to India (along with E. B. Richards) in 1912 through the J. F. Lucey Co., Chattanooga, Tenn., and will say that Cap Lucey did more to send the rotary rig all over the world than any one man or company. In 1912 they were sending men to Roumania with rigs, and also to Madagascar, Java, Sumatra and Borneo.

As to Mr. Saunders idea that a rig can not be barged, would ask him to inquire and he will find that many rigs over a 100 ft., derricks and everything complete, are floating all over the shallow waters of N.W. shores of the Gulf of Mexico and drilling wells to as deep as 8000 or 9000 ft.

I personally saw a small rig (60 ft. derrick) with draw works still on it and the drill pipe in the derrick, moved across a ravine about 150 ft. wide and ten ft. deep. This was done with eight men, and a pair of mules with a five fall block and it can be did!

When the business first started we took months to drill 1000 ft., and now they drill the same in one day. In fact there has been a well in La. drilled 8000 ft. and cased in 8 days. I believe Mr. Saunders is somewhat behind himself and has had his experience, perhaps, only with cable tools. I have used both some, but mostly rotary.

I think, personally that Mr. Burtis' "War of the Wild Cats" is A-1 plus, and hope to see many more from him. I am sure that he has had many more plauds than stones from the old boys who saw it all grow up.

I still drill a well now and then but have been building ships for over a year with the old rig stacked just waiting till this damn war is over.

With best wishes to the magazine and also Mr. Burtis, I remain, your friend

—Hardy Roberts,
Box 573,
Pasadena, Texas.

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Thanks mightily, Mr. Roberts, for the informative data as well as the pleasant words about the story and the magazine. Both letters above are exactly the kind we like to get. We meant what we said last month when we asked: Who's to keep us on our toes if not alert readers who can spot errors or add additional facts or sidelights to material in the magazine?

KENDALL MURPHY of 38 Dakota St., San Francisco, Calif., writes—

> I have just finished R. A. Emberg's "Sweetwater Pirate" in the March issue. It is an excellent story and my criticism is not malicious. I spent several months in the city of Port Huron which is at a point where the St. Clair River flows out of Lake Huron. The current is very swift here and also for several miles down stream. I have navigated it in a power boat. Did Demarest's schooner, the one he stole from the British, come up this swift water under her own power? The author doesn't say so, but he lets the reader think so. From everything I have ever heard from old sailors at Port Huron, ships had to be towed through here—that is, sailing ships.

Mr. Murphy is a long way from those sweetwaters he once cruised and so is Mr. Emberg who writes about them. It took a good many weeks before the letters from the two Californians — Emberg answered from Lake Tahoe—to reach us and find their way into print. Here's what the author of the story says—

> Dear Mr. Murphy:
>
> Thanks a lot for your comments re "Sweetwater Pirate." I know the Port Huron-Sarnia vicinity very well, in fact I used to swim there, using the jib-boom of an old schooner berthed in the mud just behind the Northern Navigation Company docks as a diving board.
>
> And I agree with you that the current in the St. Clair is swift. BUT SAILING SHIPS DID NAVIGATE THIS WATER (upstream) under their own power. Of course, the wind had to be right, almost a dead southerly. Many a schooner have I seen coming up river at this place, canvas spread wing and wing, and I believe you can verify this statement by writing the Lake Carriers' Association, Rockefeller Building, Cleveland, Ohio, attention Geo. Marr.
>
> However, ships did not depend on southerlies to get into Lake Huron. During the sailing ship era on the lakes, probably twenty-five tugs were employed in the upper St. Clair, towing down river as well as up. A great many tows were taken right through, that is, from Lime-Kiln Crossing on the Detroit River, up the Detroit, through Lake St. Clair and the St. Clair River, into Lake Huron, and naturally, the

reverse on the down river voyage. Some of these huge tugs would tow as many as eight ships at one time. I recall the names of some of them: The *Kate Williams, Sweepstakes, Moffat, Satellite* and *Masters.*

In the old days ships would come into the river, drop anchor and wait for a tow. A snorting tug with a bewhiskered skipper whose chin dripped tobacco juice would come alongside, hawsers would be made fast between tug and leading ship, other hawsers strung aft to other vessels and the tug would head upstream with as many as eight vessels dangling behind. Tow-ropes broke frequently and the tug-skipper would tell the world a few things and the skippers of the craft being towed would stand on their forepeaks and tell the tugman just what sort of a swab he was. There was the case of Captain Angus MacCollum of the tug, *Sheba,* who enraged for reasons at Cap'n Bill McKinnon of the leading schooner right behind him, took a pot-shot at the latter, and shot his own towing hawser in two, fouling his own propeller with the free end.

Yours,
R. A. Emberg.

THE dossier of Riley Grannan's career through the pages of *Adventure* covers two whole filing cards and part of a third. The famous piece first appeared in the January 1912 issue. The author's original title was "How Riley Grannan's Race Was Run," but it was never used in print. "Riley Grannan's Last Adventure—And After" was the way it was on that initial contents page, and the way it appeared the first time it was reprinted by popular demand in the Mid-August 1919 issue. Those were in the "good old days" when our magazine was issued thrice monthly—on the 1st, 10th and 20th. *(No paper difficulties in those days!)* The—*And After* tail to the title was lopped off when it was printed for the third time in the Special Xmas Number of 1926 and has never grown back. It was next republished in the June 1st, 1929 issue and once again in the December 1st, 1930 number, hardly a year and a half later, at which time it was first issued in pamphlet form to sell for 10c a copy. Thousands of the little 8-page booklets were distributed and not till November '35, *Adventure's* 25th Anniversary, did it again appear in the magazine. Now, this month we are printing it once more for the seventh time.

As we have explained, we have exhausted our supply of the pamphlets, and owing to the grave paper shortage existing now we are unable to reissue any more for the duration. The demand for copies of "Riley," however, continues, so we give him to you once more in the magazine itself. Better hang onto this issue if you're a Grannanite and want the piece for your files!—K. S. W.

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LOST TRAILS

NOTE: We offer this department to readers who wish to get in touch again with friends or acquaintances separated by years or chance. Give your own name and full address. Please notify *Adventure* immediately should you establish contact with the person you are seeking. Space permitting, each inquiry addressed to *Lost Trails* will be run in three consecutive issues. Requests by and for women are declined, as not considered effective in a magazine published for men. *Adventure* also will decline any notice that may not seem a sincere effort to recover an old friendship, or that may not seem suitable to the editors for any other reason. No charge is made for publication of notices.

Anyone knowing the whereabouts of Louis Dworak, born July 26, 1919 in Meriden, Conn., left home in Paterson, N. J. in August 1938. Last heard from in Chicago heading West. Had worked in rodeo which went bankrupt in Miami, Fla. Christmas of 1937. Please notify Joseph J. Dworak Cox, Fire Dept. B, Camp Peary, Va.

Would like to hear from Bill Daly from El Paso, Texas. He is a salesman of automobiles and automobile parts. Very important J. L. Hobson, 633½ West 85 St., Los Angeles 44, Calif.

Any information as to the whereabouts of Rochus Cofer of Smithfield, Va., last heard of eleven years ago, will be appreciated by his brother, John M. Cofer, 124 N. North Carolina Ave., Atlantic City, N. J.

William J. Smith, age 51 years, light blue eyes, dark brown hair, height 6 ft., last heard of in State of Washington. He was born in Montesano, Wash., and spent school days in Grants Pass, Ore. Anyone knowing his whereabouts please communicate with his brother-in-law, C. E. Baker, 968 Neilson St., Berkeley 6, Calif.

Albert R. Gately—the best pal I ever had—was last heard from in Missouri. I would like to locate him. Anyone knowing his whereabouts write Morton A. Richard, 1213 N. 24th St., Phoenix, Ariz.

Louis Sixt, probably known as Bob Six, last heard of in Gananoque, Ont. and Vancouver, B. C. Age about 26, height 4 ft. 10 in., weight 135 lbs., gray eyes, back-brushed straight brown hair. Scrapper, gambler, seafaring man. Anyone having knowledge of his whereabouts please write his brother Paul Sixt, c/o *Adventure*.

Max Kennison Todd, please communicate with your grandson, Donald Todd, Rt. 13, Box 781 A, Houston, Texas.

(Continued from page 135)

onds for 100 yards. The approximate gain is estimated at one second per turn when covering distances of 150 yards, upward, and the estimate has proven remarkably accurate in practical usage, probably because, as a rule, the faster swimmers are the more skilled at the turns.

A good many factors contribute to the more or less speed of a pool. Some of them are depth, width, scum gutters, starting take-off and turning walls. There is a drag in swimming in shallow water and both width and scum gutters affect performances because they increase or decrease the choppiness churned up by swimmers; the wider the pool, the less the disturbance, and gutters carry off some of the choppiness, while lack of them causes the walls to throw back the splash; the higher the take-off, within the prescribed limits, the greater the distance obtainable from the starting dive, and, of course, whether the turning walls are slippery, or provide a firm foothold for the push-off, makes a material difference.

Various views have been expressed by experts considering the effects of fresh and salt water on swimming, but the majority opinion appears to be that fresh water is faster for the sprints and salt water for courses of 220 yards, upward.

NOT often do our *AA* experts slip up in answering a query but when they do they're the first to hasten in a correction. In June, in this department, our numismatician, William L. Clark, answered a query about a $2.00 bill with seal and number in yellow by saying that such was a homemade freak. Mr. Frank Plowman, of Stamford, Conn., points out that these "Gold Seal" bills are Allied currency not supposed to be used in the U. S. proper but for soldiers in foreign parts. He further informs us that such bills are coming through with overprint of Hawaii but banks will accept only for collection. Mr. Clark extends thanks for this information and adds that he answered the query regarding the phoney-looking bill before the government had released the information relative to the use of the "Gold Seal" currency for overseas circulation. His answer was perfectly correct insofar as past experience could have indicated, just didn't include the last-minute change in the monetary set-up.

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(Continued from page 134)

to the water as possible and then rip her when the destroyer is alongside.

I'm looking over the situation when way off towards the island I notice a flash. The sun has just come up and I figure it must have bounced off a whitecap or something. But there's another flash, then another—short ones and long ones. You've guessed it. It's Mike. How he got off that exploding island I'll never know, but he must have, for there he is directly in line with the island, downwind. Betsy and I take our time about dropping, for now we're leading the destroyer to Mike. I can't see him, but I can read his flashes: "Poor old Buka ain't what she used to be. What are we going to do about breakfast?"

On one of Margo's tiny message blanks I scribble, *Two expendable breakfasts requested.* This time she agrees to take it to the carrier. I toss her into the air. She circles Betsy once and sets her course towards our task force.

I rip off a few yards of tissue paper and heave them over the side. They tell me that the wind'll take me mighty close to Mike.

A couple of hours later Betsy's dripping bag and basket are laid out on the carrier's flight deck to dry. Mike and I are hitting the chow and getting caught up on what happened to each other. Betsy and her crew rate a Presidential Citation, at least, we're telling ourselves. Commander Annapolis pulls up a chair.

"Glad you fellows weren't on the island when all hell broke loose last night." He must notice our jaws drop. "This morning's report says a cruiser shelled it."

By this time we're open-mouthed, wide-eyed and fit to be tied.

He continues, "And maybe you heard—a couple of torpedo planes got a sub."

I'm ready to explode.

"You two officers and the balloon, remember, are still 'aboard' at Lakehurst."

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An' what we say goes double
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